

“Even As I Am”

Mark E. Petersen

Yes, we know who He is, this Christ of whom we speak. And we know that He lives!

He is the light and the life of the world. That is why we sing:

*The Lord is my light;
Then why should I fear?*

As Latter-day Saints, gathered tonight in many places, we joyfully bear record to all the world that Jesus of Nazareth is truly the Christ, our Savior, the divine Son of God.

But He is more than that. He is our Creator, for He made all things both in heaven and earth. And He is even more yet. He is also our Friend.

We worship Him, the Son of God.

We obey Him, our Savior and Redeemer.

We love Him, our gracious Friend.

But He has work for us to do. He is not satisfied with worship alone. He is not content merely with adoration. He asks us for *service*—day-to-day service in His church and kingdom.

He asks us to join with Him in a work of salvation—a work of saving ourselves, but others as well. Said He:

“The worth of souls is great in the sight of God; ... Wherefore, you”—each one of you, each of us, all of us—are called to aid Him in bringing light and eternal joy into our own lives and into the lives of others also. (See D&C 18:10–14.)

It is the Lord Himself who calls. And to what purpose? To help us to become like Him.

Jesus came to earth many centuries ago as a mortal man. He preached His gospel in Palestine, gathered friends and converts about Him, and organized His church with only a handful of members.

But as He taught and performed many miracles, multitudes followed Him. There were four thousand at one time, and five thousand at another. Even the children loved Him.

Both men and women were converted to His teachings, and He welcomed them. Often the women seemed more devoted than the men, and He honored them for it. However, with all His goodness, bitter enemies arose and falsely accused Him, calling Him a blasphemer because He announced Himself as the Son of God.

Later they crucified Him; and to humiliate Him still further, they raised His cross between two thieves as if to brand Him as a criminal like unto them.

When His body was tenderly placed in the tomb by Joseph of Arimathaea, the men who carried Him there soon left, but a group of faithful women lingered nearby.

On the third day afterward, the Savior arose from the dead, restored to life, resurrected life! And who stood by for this momentous event? The angels, of course. They rolled away the stone, and folded up His burial clothes. But was anyone else there?

Yes. These same faithful women. They came early that morning. They saw the angels, who told them—the first of all people—that Jesus had risen.

And to whom did the Lord first appear after His resurrection? It was to one of these same women, a believing, faithful handmaiden.

Before anyone else saw Him, He made known His victory over death to this devoted and humble woman, whose name was Mary. She was the first one on earth to see a resurrected person, the first to greet the risen Lord as He emerged from the tomb—the first of all mankind, this lovely woman.

All the hosts of heaven had looked forward to this great event. The ancient prophets had spoken of it and yearned for it. But who was favored to see it first? A woman—a faithful, believing woman, Mary—there in the garden, near the tomb, where the angels spoke to her.

The Savior's atonement was the most important thing that has ever happened. His resurrection was the crowning achievement of it all. And it was shown first to a righteous, believing woman.

Then does Christ honor womanhood?

His mother was a wonderful woman who nurtured Him through infancy, guided Him in His childhood, found Him in the temple when she thought He was lost, and initiated His first miracle when He became a man. (See Luke 2:41–49; John 2:1–11.)

Oh, how He honored His mother!

And it was to a woman—a Samaritan woman by Jacob's well—to whom He positively identified Himself as the Messiah when He said, "I that speak unto thee am he." (John 4:26.)

When Lazarus, His dear friend, passed away and the Lord visited the grieving family, it was to a woman that He made one of the most significant statements of His entire ministry:

"I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." (John 11:25.)

It was a woman who bathed His feet with her tears. (See Luke 7:37–38.) A woman anointed His head with costly ointment, a thing so significant in His eyes that He said that her act of adoration would be made known wherever the gospel is preached. (See Matt. 26:6–13.)

It was a woman who received of His mercy when through her repentance she was told to go her way and sin no more. (See John 8:11.)

It was to a sick and suffering woman that He said, “Thy faith hath made thee whole.” (Matt. 9:22.)

It was a woman who begged Him to heal her daughter and in her pleading even likened herself to one eating crumbs under the table. His divine approbation distilled upon her, and He said: “O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt.” (Matt. 15:28.)

It was out of compassion for a grieving widow that He raised her son from death. (See Luke 7:12–15.) It was another widow whom He praised when her two mites were cast into the temple treasury. (See Mark 12:42–44.)

Devoted women stood with His mother at the foot of the cross on Calvary during His agony. She was His great concern in the midst of His suffering, which suffering, He said, “caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain.” (D&C 19:18.) In the midst of all that, His concern was for His mother. (See John 19:25–27.)

Then is righteous womanhood near to the heart of the Savior? Are girls who grow up to become good women? He needs all of you in His fold to aid Him in His ministry.

Suffer the children—suffer the girls, both the younger ones and the older ones; suffer the women, married and single; suffer the men and the boys; suffer those who have gone astray but repent and come back—suffer *all* to come unto Him, for righteous and repentant souls are what the kingdom of heaven is made of.

You Latter-day Saints girls, younger and older; you Latter-day Saint women, married and single—He asks each of you, all of you, to stand up and be counted for Him, to be on His side, and never cross over to the opposition.

It is true that He established His Church anciently when He lived in mortality, but uninspired men altered it and destroyed it. To preserve His gospel, He took it from this wicked earth and kept it in heaven for a time, awaiting a better day.

As the prophets foretold, in the very hour of God’s judgment He would bring it back to earth. He would send an angel as His messenger, flying through the midst of heaven. (See Rev. 14:6–7.) He would raise up a new prophet to receive the angel, and through him restore His truth. (See 2 Ne. 3:7–16.) All this the Lord has now done.

Who was this new prophet?

He, too, was nurtured by a devoted mother throughout his childhood, and through serious illness, and through persecution that came to him even as a boy.

Knowing the importance of womanhood to the gospel plan, the Almighty raised up another great woman to become the wife of that prophet; and these two women, mother and wife, singly and together, cared for him, fed him, clothed him, nursed him through attacks of violence, and together they mourned at his martyrdom.

They defied persecution and death for themselves, never flinched in hardship, and through it all bore constant testimony that Joseph Smith was God’s latter-day prophet and that the gospel which he had received from the angels indeed was true.

They *knew* it, these women. They had lived through it hour by hour, day by day for years. They verily knew!

Strong men also stood by the prophet, and they were made even stronger by faithful women who at times seemed to possess a greater insight into the purpose of things.

Later, as pioneers, they moved west. Women and girls, men and boys, with handcarts and ox-teams made the trek to the Rocky Mountains to establish new homes.

Why did they do it?

God brought them here to fulfill prophecy! It was part of the divine preparation for the second coming of Christ!

With their all on the altar, they established God's Zion here in the tops of the mountains as foretold by the prophet Isaiah. (See Isa. 2:2–3.)

These women knew that their men and boys had been called into a royal priesthood which was to minister for God in these last days. But they themselves were called to labor for the same cause in specially assigned responsibilities designated for women by the Lord. So men and women alike, both married and single, were called to lay the foundation of God's latter-day work. And they did it!

New generations followed—girls and boys of faith and righteousness, boys and girls of loyalty and integrity, girls and boys who would be as true to Christ as their parents were. The torch was passed to them.

“Carry on, carry on!” was the cry. (See *Hymns*, no. 42.) And as these young people caught that torch and held it high, they sang:

*True to the faith that our parents have cherished,
True to the truth for which martyrs have perished.*

And they meant every word of it. They were true!

But now they have passed the torch on to us. What shall we do with it?

Shall we do as well as they did? Yes, at least.

Shall we shrink or shun the fight? No, never.

Shall we defend both truth and right? Yes, by all means.

Shall we grasp the iron rod, and strive to be found worthy of the kingdom of our God?

Yes! We shall! We shall!

And will we always remember this Lord whom we are to serve and in whose Church we shall labor?

He is the same Christ our parents knew, this Christ who cherishes His daughters equally with His sons.

It is this Christ who now calls each of us—tonight—young and old, married and single, to join His great work, to accept our place in His Kingdom and build His

Church, which is the only way to salvation for every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. He asks us to put on the whole armor of God—faith, truth, and purity, with which to “quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.” (See D&C 27:15–18.)

He knows the path to victory. To help us find it and then to stay on it, He asks us to “seek ... first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness” just as He did. (Matt. 6:33.)

He asks us to honor chastity, as He did.

He asks us to be kind, as He was.

He asks us to be honest, as He was.

He asks us to shun all evil, as He did.

Can we ever forget His rejection of Lucifer when the devil tempted Him with wealth and power and then appealed to his appetite? What did Jesus say?

He declared that we shall not live by bread alone, nor by base desires, nor worldly standards of popularity: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” (Matt. 4:4.)

He echoed His earlier command to have no other gods before Him, neither gods of pleasure nor of self-gratification. Rather, He said, “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.” (Matt. 4:10.)

He asks us to defend virtue, as He did.

He asks us to be truthful, as He was.

He asks us to be forgiving, as He was.

He asks us to be just and fair to all, as He was.

He asks us to honor our parents, as He did.

He asks us to cherish His gospel, as He did.

He asks us to honor the Sabbath day, as He did.

He asks us to walk in His paths with the faith that if we do, He will care for us. Consider the lilies of the field and the fowls of the air. Are we not much better than they? (See Matt. 6:26, 28.)

He resisted temptation, and so must we.

He never forgot to pray, and neither must we.

He never forgot His Father in Heaven, and neither must we.

Our great Redeemer calls us to be loyal as we take up the torch of our destiny. Let us never disappoint Him. Though evil abounds in the world and violence grows by the day, He will watch over us if we are true. He has pledged to protect the righteous even if He must send down fire from heaven to do so. (See D&C 35:14.)

If we will stand by Him, He will stand by us!

And who is He?

He is our Savior, and our God, and our merciful and understanding Friend. And who are we?

We are His chosen people of modern times. We are the Latter-day Saints—Latter-day Saints for Christ!

*[Then] sing all hail to Jesus' name
And praise and honor give
To Him who bled on Calvary's hill
And died that we might live.
Then hail, all hail, to [Christ our King]
Who saves us by his blood!
He's marked the way and bids us tread
The path that leads to God.*

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.