

President Gordon B. Hinckley

Those great words sung by the Tabernacle Choir "Rejoice, the Lord Is King" become somewhat of a prologue to what I would like to say today.

Testimony that Jesus is the Christ

This is a glorious occasion. It is April, the season of spring in this hemisphere, when there is a new stirring of life in all of nature. Soon it will be Easter, the time when the Christian world commemorates the resurrection from the dead of the Son of God.

We who are assembled in this great general conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints give our testimony to all the world that Jesus is the Christ, the living Son of the living God; that he came to earth in the meridian of time, the offspring of Deity; that he walked the roads of Palestine, declaring the truths of the eternal gospel, healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the blind to see, and bringing the transcendent messianic message of hope to all who would hear; that he was taken by evil men, condemned, and crucified on Calvary's Hill; that he rose the third day, the firstfruits of them that slept, the conqueror of death, the master of eternal life; that "as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22); that he and his Father, the great Elohim, appeared to the boy Joseph Smith in the spring of 1820, ushering in this the dispensation of the fulness of times; that he stands at the head of this church which bears his name; that in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, the government of the kingdom of God is upon his shoulder, and his name is "called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

I bear solemn witness of him and of his unique and singular place in the plan of eternal salvation of God our Eternal Father. I bear witness of these

things by the power and authority of the holy apostleship in me vested.

Office of Apostle

If the Spirit will guide me, I wish to say something this morning of this wonderful and sacred office in the holy priesthood, the office of Apostle.

Yesterday we sustained two of our Brethren in this sacred calling, thus, after they are ordained, filling the Council of the Twelve Apostles. I want to give you my testimony that they were chosen and called by the spirit of prophecy and revelation. There was much of prayer concerning this matter. There was discussion with President Kimball, the prophet of the Lord in our day, and a clear statement from him, for his is the prerogative in these matters. There was a clear and distinct impression, what I choose to call the whisperings of the Holy Spirit, concerning those who should be selected to assume this most important and sacred responsibility. These who have been called are men of experience in the world and in the Church. They are men of learning and achievement in their respective professions, who have received the accolades of praise from their peers and from many who have admired them from near and far. But this is not why they were chosen.

Their service in the Church has been noteworthy. Since they were boys, each has been faithful and active. Each has served in a stake presidency. Each has served as a Regional Representative. They have been involved in many capacities of Church service, and have performed with excellence in each instance. But this is not why they were called.

Called as special witnesses for Christ

They were called because the Lord wanted them in this office as men who

have a witness of his divinity, and whose voices have been and will be raised in testimony of his reality.

Each is a man of faith. After they are ordained to the holy apostleship and are set apart as members of the Council of the Twelve, they will be expected to devote themselves primarily to the work of the ministry. They will place first in their lives, above all other considerations, the responsibility to stand as special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world.

Some will ask, why has the Church taken such competent men out of public service in their professions when they are doing so much good where they now are? I do not know. The Church has not done it. Rather, the Lord has made clear that these are they who should serve as his witnesses. There are others, well trained and equally qualified, to carry on what they have been doing. These two have now received a peculiar and unique calling to which the Lord, in his better wisdom, has beckoned them.

As with all of us, they are men who are human. They have their strengths and their weaknesses. But henceforth, for the remainder of their lives, as long as they remain faithful, their one chief concern must be the advancement of the work of God in the earth. They must be concerned with the welfare of our Father's children, both those within the Church and those out of the Church. They must do all that they can to give comfort to those who mourn, to give strength to those who are weak, to give encouragement to those who falter, to befriend the friendless, to nurture the destitute, to bless the sick, to bear witness, not out of belief but out of a certain knowledge of the Son of God, their Friend and Master, whose servants they are.

"One sent forth with certain authority and responsibility"

It has always seemed a remarkable thing to me that, although the Lord

chose twelve Apostles to assist him in the work of the ministry, and to extend it following his death; and that although Paul, who was an Apostle, declared that the Church should be "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (Ephesians 2:20)—notwithstanding all of this, the office of Apostle, and certainly a Council of Twelve Apostles, is not found to my knowledge in other Christian churches.

Nor is the office of Seventy, to which a number of men have been called at this conference. This is likewise an office that carries with it the responsibility of bearing apostolic witness of the name of Christ.

The word *apostle*, in its origin, literally means "one sent forth." If that definition were stated to say "one sent forth with certain authority and responsibility," it would properly describe the calling as it was given at the time our Lord walked the earth, and as it has been given in our time.

Luke records concerning the Master "that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.

"And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles" (Luke 6:12-13).

It is significant to me that the Lord chose those who should walk next to him only after he had prayed all night concerning the matter.

Matthew records:

"And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. . . .

"These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them: . . .

"As ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

"Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. . . .

Sunday, April 8, 1984

Second day

"For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you" (Matthew 10:1, 5, 7, 8, 20).

Apostles restored through revelation

This same office of Apostle was restored to the earth when the Church was reestablished in this dispensation. In the revelation on Church organization received in April of 1830, Joseph Smith was spoken of as one "who was called of God, and ordained an apostle of Jesus Christ, to be the first elder of this church;

"And to Oliver Cowdery, who was also called of God, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to be the second elder of this church, and ordained under his hand" (D&C 20:2-3).

Brigham Young recounts the interesting circumstances associated with the organization of the first Quorum of the Twelve in this dispensation. In 1834 a group of the leading brethren in Ohio traveled to Missouri to assist their associates there, and then returned to Ohio. It was a long and difficult journey, most of it on foot. It was a time of severe testing. Brigham Young said:

"After we returned from Missouri, my brother Joseph Young and myself had been singing after preaching in a meeting; and when the meeting was dismissed, Brother Joseph Smith said, 'Come, go down to my house with me.' We went and sang to him a long time, and talked with him. He then opened the subject of the Twelve and Seventies for the first time I ever thought of it. He said, 'Brethren, I am going to call out Twelve Apostles. I think we will get together and select Twelve Apostles, and select a Quorum of Seventies from those who have been up to Zion.' . . . In 1835, the last of January or in February, or about that time," President Young says, "we held our meetings from day to day, and brother Joseph called out Twelve Apostles at that time. He had a revelation when we were singing to him. Those who were acquainted with him knew when the Spirit of reve-

lation was upon him, for his countenance wore an expression peculiar to himself while under that influence. He preached by the Spirit of revelation, and taught in his council by it, and those who were acquainted with him could discover it at once, for at such times there was a peculiar clearness and transparency in his face" (*Journal of Discourses*, 9:89).

Importance of Twelve Apostles

The Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon—Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris—were given the responsibility of nominating the first members of the Twelve in this dispensation. When they were selected, they were convened in a meeting held in Kirtland on February 27, 1835. Oliver Cowdery served as clerk in that meeting and wrote this in the minutes:

"President Smith proposed the following question: What importance is there attached to the calling of the Twelve Apostles, different from the other callings or officers of the Church?"

"After the question was discussed, . . . President Joseph Smith, Jun. gave the following decision:

"They are the Twelve Apostles, who are called to the office of the Traveling High Council, who are to preside over the churches of the Saints, among the Gentiles, where there is no presidency established; and they are to travel and preach among the Gentiles, until the Lord shall command them to go to the Jews. They are to hold the keys of this ministry, to unlock the door of the Kingdom of heaven unto all nations, and to preach the Gospel to every creature. This is the power, authority, and virtue in their apostleship" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938], p. 74).

Great and sacred ministry

As set forth in the further revelations, they are to work under the direc-

tion of the First Presidency and to go forth as "special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world" (D&C 107:23).

When they need assistance in this duty they are to call upon the Seventy and then upon others as circumstances dictate.

Since the opening of the work in this dispensation there have been some eighty-four men serve as members of the Council of the Twelve Apostles. Elders Nelson and Oaks become the eighty-fifth and eighty-sixth men so chosen and ordained and set apart, as will be the case when that is completed. Great and sacred is their ministry. As one who for twenty years served as a member of that unique and remarkable quorum, I give witness to their brotherhood, to their devotion, their faith, their industry, and their tremendous service in advancing the kingdom of God.

Unity in leading councils

If I may speak now for a moment in a personal vein, I wish to express before you my appreciation for them. It is now almost three years since I was called by President Kimball to serve as a Counselor in the First Presidency of the Church. During a substantial part of that period I have humbly tried to carry a great and awesome responsibility. I have known something of loneliness and worry and deep concern. I have prayed earnestly for direction and strength and guidance. I have called on these my beloved Brethren of the Twelve. They have freely and generously given of support, assistance, and inspired counsel.

There is unity in the First Presidency of the Church. There is unity between the Presidency and the Twelve, perfect unity. There is unity among the members of the First Quorum of the Seventy and the Presiding Bishopric. I am somewhat familiar with the history of this Church, and I do not hesitate to say that there has never been greater unity in its leading coun-

cils and the relationships of those councils one to another, than there is today.

I love my Brethren. To a man they are loyal. They are supportive. Without hesitation they respond to every call regardless of personal convenience. They are true disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now again, when these two are ordained and set apart, the quorum will be full. Two remarkable and wonderful men were lost with the passing of Elder LeGrand Richards and Elder Mark E. Petersen. Two remarkable and wonderful men have been called to take their places, called under the direction of the Lord, and sustained by the faith of the membership of the Church.

Holy Ghost bears witness to faithful members

The work goes on in majesty and power. The kingdom grows, solidly and consistently. Testimony strengthens in the hearts and lives of the members of the Church across the world. Herein lies the great strength of this kingdom. It is the conviction, solid and real and personal, that is found in the hearts of millions of Latter-day Saints who live in many lands and who speak a variety of tongues. Each is a part of a great society of believers. Each faithful member knows that God our Eternal Father lives. Each knows that Jesus is the Christ, the Redeemer and the Savior of mankind. They know these great salient truths because of the power of the Holy Ghost which bears individual witness to them.

God be thanked for the wonder of his work and for the mysterious and certain way in which it moves forward.

Appreciation for support

I express deep, sincere appreciation, not only for the support of my Brethren of the General Authorities, but of the Latter-day Saints throughout the world. I have felt the power of your prayers. I am aware of your sustaining hands and hearts. Most sincerely I

thank you for the manner in which you labor, unselfishly and with a great and moving faith, to advance the work of God and to assist in bringing to pass his eternal purposes with reference to his sons and daughters.

May God bless each of you wherever you may be. May your faith strengthen as you serve in righteousness. May your testimonies grow ever stronger as you drink of the fountain of eternal truth. May you be blessed in your basket and in your store as you walk honestly with the Lord in the support of his great kingdom. May the peace of Christ abide in your hearts and in your homes, I humbly pray in his holy name, even the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

The Tabernacle Choir will now sing "We'll Sing the songs of Zion," following which Elder Russell M. Nelson, who was sustained as a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles yesterday, will address us. He will be followed by Sister Barbara Ann Winder, who was sustained yesterday as general president of the Relief Society.

The Choir sang "We'll Sing the Songs of Zion."

Elder Russell M. Nelson

A significant day

Saturday of April conference of 1984 has been circled on our calendar for many years, for that date was targeted as the first time in my life that our only son would be old enough to attend general priesthood meeting with me. Last night, that long awaited goal became a reality. Brothers and sisters, little did we know that on that day my name would be presented as a member of the Council of the Twelve.

Since we didn't know, our children didn't know either. Our married daughters telephoned us between sessions. One, who was expecting a baby, said, "Daddy, I was so shocked by that announcement—I think I am going into labor."

That she did.

So President Hinckley, your announcement from the First Presidency should get credit at least for "an assist." Our twenty-second grandchild arrived safely last evening!

Feelings of inadequacy and faith

A wide array of feelings has flashed through my heart since I heard the call that will change my life. The first feeling is that of personal inadequacy. That feeling is intensified as I think of the incomparable power of Elders LeGrand Richards and Mark E. Petersen, whose absence we keenly sense. They were, to me, dear friends as well as esteemed leaders. Then, as I look about and see the strength of those more qualified and able than I, I truly am humbled by this calling.

Fortunately, these feelings are blanketed by feelings of faith, for I know the words of Nephi are true: "I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them" (1 Nephi 3:7). I have implicit faith in the Lord and in His prophets. I have learned not to put question marks but to use exclamation points when calls are issued