

Elder Marvin J. Ashton

“Lo, I am with thee”

Less than four months after The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organized, the leaders were subject to intense persecution. Partial seclusion had become necessary. During this trying period, Joseph Smith had the following revealed to him:

“Behold, thou wast called and chosen to write the Book of Mormon, and to my ministry; and I have lifted thee up out of thine afflictions, and have counseled thee, that thou hast been delivered from all thine enemies, and thou hast been delivered from the powers of Satan and from darkness! . . .

“Be patient in afflictions, for thou shalt have many; but endure them, for, lo, I am with thee, even unto the end of thy days” (D&C 24:1, 8).

The words “For, lo, I am with thee, even unto the end of thy days” were the Lord’s voice of gladness to His beloved prophet. His message to Joseph Smith and to us is “You can do it, and I will help you.”

A voice of gladness

Recently we read in local newspapers an account of the devastating effects of a fire that completely gutted a low-cost housing apartment. Many people were rushed out into the street for safety. They watched their living quarters and other earthly possessions go up in fire and smoke. One elderly gentleman who had escaped the holocaust was interviewed. When he was asked, “What were you able to save?” he responded with, “Only the things that you see: my clothing.” His next comment was touching and significant. It was simply, “Thank God there were no serious injuries or casualties.”

What did we hear from this tragedy? A voice of gladness from someone who could have been bitter and angry

with the situation but chose to share a mature sense of values. He was bigger than that which had happened. He saw beyond the present and gave appreciation and hope for conditions and people in the future.

Disappointments, death, losses, or failures are real and difficult to manage but should never cause us to have barbed tongues, lasting resentment, or negative attitudes. The gospel encourages us to develop the capacity to learn from the past and present and see the opportunities that can be ours in the days to come.

From the Doctrine and Covenants we are given this counsel: “Now, what do we hear in the gospel which we have received? A voice of gladness! A voice of mercy from heaven; and a voice of truth out of the earth; glad tidings for the dead; a voice of gladness for the living and the dead; glad tidings of great joy. How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those that bring glad tidings of good things” (128:19).

Bring gladness to others

The Lord would have us mingle our voices of gladness with His to give strength, encouragement, and joy to His children.

I recall as a young boy going with my father to visit an elderly widow living in humble circumstances. We shared a couple of boxes of food with her. When we were leaving, her remarks touched my heart. She said, “Thank you, Bishop, and please come back again, even if it’s just to say hello.”

This was probably the first time I realized that the food items were appreciated but the words of encouragement and the personal visit were of greater value.

In the world, where there are often voices of pessimism and negative feel-

ings, the voice of gladness is welcome indeed. Some seem to live with doubt, fear of the future, and sorrow for the past. If it is our nature to criticize or demean, we can cause the voices of gladness to be silenced. We need those who bring gladness into our lives. We need those who give encouragement and reflect optimism.

Sincere yet simple words of praise can lift souls and bring gladness. Mark Twain remarked that he could live two months on one good compliment. In the words of the biblical proverbs of Solomon: "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver" (Proverbs 25:11).

Encouragement can be quick and simple, but it is a voice of gladness that is needed by everyone.

Most of our returning military personnel are willing to be examples of voices of gladness as they remind us that some things in life, like precious freedom and liberty, are more important than life itself. Many have had their lives changed permanently, but their voices of gladness overshadow the prevailing interruption and sacrifices they have made for all of us. Hope springs eternal for those who have the vision to trust in and to live by God's inspired principles.

The gospel teachings have brought glad tidings to all the world. The subtle messages remind us of attitudes which can help us face the trials of life with less difficulty. Research has verified the fact that bitterness injures more the person who carries it than the one who caused it.

The hope of young cancer patients

Erma Bombeck has written a book about young cancer patients. As she planned her book, she came to the conclusion that the voices that came from these young people were filled with

humor and optimism which kept "these kids in the mainstream of life. Perhaps laughing and believing in themselves was a major part of their survival" (Erma Bombeck, *I Want to Grow Hair, I Want to Grow Up, I Want to Go to Boise* [New York: Harper and Row, 1989], p. xxi).

One sixteen-year-old boy said, "Man, without a sense of humor I wouldn't have made it this far" (Bombeck, p. xviii).

The author interviewed the youths with cancer and read many letters from them. She found one word constantly surfacing: *attitude*.

"They took personal pride in the fact that they were fighting something bigger than they were and stronger than they were—something that might even overpower them. But they still had something their enemies couldn't take away—hope. It is a formidable weapon. . . . When all else fails, pull out the big artillery, HOPE, and hang on" (Bombeck, pp. 5–6).

Words of gladness in the scriptures

Words of hope and gladness are often repeated in the scriptures to help us think and perform positively.

Isaiah says of Jesus Christ: "And when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him . . . ; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and . . . he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (Isaiah 53:2–3).

But even though His suffering was beyond our comprehension, His voice of gladness reminds us, "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Jesus challenges all of us to be happy and optimistic. As the cancer patients learned and medical research has proven: "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones" (Proverbs 17:22).

Glad voices from those who suffer

Recently during a regional conference in California, a well-trained multi-stake chorus furnished beautiful music. As I listened and watched them, I was impressed with the fact that on the front row were four individuals who were participating with the choir who sang not with their voices but with their hands. I thought to myself on that occasion, how wonderful for a choir director to encourage their participation. Without the advantage of melody or audible lyrics, they were able to stand with pride and a sense of belonging to share their communication of gladness and be an inspiration to all the congregation.

Deference, courtesy, and respect had made their voices of gladness strengthening and comforting.

Thank God for noble souls who can and do weather life's storms with sincere voices of gladness which overshadow the present and make the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ real and strengthening.

"Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another" (Romans 14:19).

After a night of intense pain and suffering, one morning a husband stricken with a terminal illness said to his wife with great feeling, "I am so thankful today." "For what?" she asked, knowing well his difficult and trying situation. He replied, "For God giving me the privilege of one more day with you." A voice of gladness is so refreshing when an attitude of despair might be deemed appropriate.

How helpful and rewarding it would be if all of us would likewise thank God for one more day. For what? For the opportunity to take care of some unfinished business, to express appreciation, to repent, to right some wrongs, to influence for good some

wayward child, to reach out to someone who cried for help—in short, to thank God for one more day to prepare to meet Him.

Peter proclaims glad tidings

"Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.

"And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple;

"Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.

"And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us.

"And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.

"Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.

"And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.

"And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.

"And all the people saw him walking and praising God" (Acts 3:1-9).

Now hear Peter's proclamation of glad tidings:

"Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?" (Acts 3:12).

Peter, through his priesthood power, declared, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk."

Then the feet of the lame man took the glad tidings of good things to all who were in the temple to hear and see.

Choose a voice of gladness, not gloom

How impressive, encouraging, and meaningful is the attitude of some parents who, when learning of the accidental death of their son while he was serving a full-time mission, were heard to say with perfect sweetness and understanding: "We will soon have another son available as a missionary. His time and service will also be in the hands of the Lord." Sure voices of gladness during tragedy help build women, men, and God's kingdom.

We can choose our reactions to difficulties and challenges. One way to learn how to incorporate the voice of gladness through tragedy or happiness is to learn to apply gospel principles. They never teach us to be overcome by the negative, by gloom, or by cynicism.

From guidelines given to us in the scriptures and by the words of prophets, we learn that life is a teaching experience. Self-pity and discouragement do not come from the teachings of the gospel of Jesus Christ. But life can be both bitter and sweet. It is up to us to choose whether we want to reflect the voices of gloom or gladness.

Voices of gladness in the scriptures

The voices of gladness were not always available to the masses. Death by fire was often the punishment for those who endeavored to read Bible manuscripts or to publish those glad works.

Little by little, customs were changed by valiant people. Now we have scriptures and words of prophets for us to study. With the help of the Holy Ghost, it is our opportunity to understand and live by the doctrine of salvation.

The voices of gladness from the scriptures remind us that we don't have to walk through life alone. Christ came that we might have life and have it

more abundantly. "For we know that it is by grace that we are saved, *after all we can do*" (2 Nephi 25:23; italics added).

Let us remember that acts of kindness with pure motives and righteous purposes can be and are encouraged to be done in quietness, gentle voices, and in privacy. We can program ourselves to build, encourage, and give strength.

What a voice of gladness was shared when our Savior, Jesus Christ, following torment, ridicule, abuse, and, ultimately, crucifixion, in a voice of mercy, glad tidings, and truth, was able to say, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

May I share my witness and testimony that I know God is pleased when we declare glad tidings of truth, righteousness, and His reality. My voice of gladness today is God lives. Jesus is the Christ. Let no one or any situation take this reality from you. I declare this message with a voice of gladness in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Monson

Elder Marvin J. Ashton of the Council of the Twelve Apostles has just addressed us.

We are grateful to the owners and operators of the many television and radio stations and cable and satellite systems for offering their facilities as a public service to bring the proceedings of this conference to a large audience in many areas of the world.

We are especially grateful for the beautiful singing of the Mormon Youth Chorus under the directorship of Robert C. Bowden with Clay Christiansen at the organ.

The Mormon Youth Chorus will now sing "Jesus, Savior, Pilot Me." The benediction will be given by Elder H. Verlan Andersen of the Seventy. This conference will then be adjourned until two o'clock this afternoon.