

SUNDAY MORNING SESSION

The fourth general session of the 163rd Annual General Conference commenced at 10:00 A.M. on Sunday, April 4, 1993. President Gordon B. Hinckley, First Counselor in the First Presidency, conducted this session.

The Tabernacle Choir provided the music for this session, with Jerold Ottley conducting and John Longhurst at the organ.

To begin the session, the choir sang "The Morning Breaks."

President Hinckley then opened the meeting with the following remarks:

President Gordon B. Hinckley

We welcome you this Sabbath morning from the Tabernacle in Salt Lake City, Utah, to the fourth general session of the 163rd annual conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

President Ezra Taft Benson, who is watching conference in his apartment, has asked me, Brother Hinckley, to conduct this session.

We acknowledge the large audience assembled in the Tabernacle and the overflow gathering in the nearby Assembly Hall, where Elders M. Russell Ballard, Ted E. Brewerton, and Jorge A. Rojas are seated on the stand.

We extend our greetings to those of you who are participating by radio, tele-

vision, cable, or satellite transmission. We are grateful to the owners and operators of the stations who are broadcasting this conference. In addition to being assembled here on Temple Square, conference congregations are found in more than 3,500 church halls across the nation and over the seas.

We acknowledge the presence this morning of government, education, and civic leaders and of members of the Church who have assembled to worship together.

The Tabernacle Choir, under the direction of Brother Jerold Ottley, with John Longhurst at the organ, will provide the music for this session. The choir opened these services by singing "The Morning Breaks" and will now sing "I Need Thee Every Hour," following which Elder William R. Bradford of the Seventy will offer the invocation.

The choir sang "I Need Thee Every Hour."

Elder William R. Bradford offered the invocation.

President Hinckley

President Thomas S. Monson, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, will be our first speaker this morning.

President Thomas S. Monson

Take time to meditate

President David O. McKay would frequently suggest the need for us to turn from the hectic day-to-day schedule filled with letters to answer, calls to be made, people to see, and meetings to attend and take time to meditate, to ponder, and to reflect on the eternal truths and the

sources of the joy and happiness which comprise each person's quest.

When we do, the mundane, the mechanical, the repetitious patterns of our lives yield to the spiritual qualities, and we acquire a much-needed dimension which inspires our daily living. When I follow this counsel, thoughts of family, experiences with friends, and treasured

memories of special days and quiet nights course through my mind and bring a sweet repose to my being.

The contrasts of Christmas

The Christmas season, with its special meaning, inevitably prompts a tear, inspires a renewed commitment to God, and provides, borrowing the words from the lovely song "Calvary," "rest to the weary and peace to the soul."

I reflect on the contrasts of Christmas. The extravagant gifts, expensively packaged and professionally wrapped, reach their zenith in the famed commercial catalogs carrying the headline "For the person who has everything." In one such reading I observed a 4,000-square-foot home wrapped with a gigantic ribbon and comparable greeting card which said, "Merry Christmas." Other items included diamond-studded clubs for the golfer, a Caribbean cruise for the traveler, and a luxury trip to the Swiss Alps for the adventurer. Such seemed to fit the theme of a Christmas cartoon which showed the Three Wise Men traveling to Bethlehem with gift boxes on their camels. One says, "Mark my words, Balthazar; we're starting something with these gifts that's going to get way out of hand!"

Then there is the remembered Christmas tale of O. Henry about a young husband and wife who lived in abject poverty yet who wanted to give one another a special gift. But they had nothing to give. Then the husband had a ray of inspiration: "I shall provide my dear wife a beautiful ornamental comb to adorn her magnificent long black hair." The wife also received an idea: "I shall obtain a lovely chain for my husband's prized watch, which he values so highly."

Christmas day came; the treasured gifts were exchanged. Then comes the surprise ending so typical of O. Henry's short stories: The wife had shorn her long hair and sold it to obtain funds to purchase the watch chain, only to discover that her husband had sold his watch that

he might purchase the comb to adorn her beautiful long hair, which now she did not have.¹

The Christmas cane

At home in a hidden-away corner, I have a small black walking stick with an imitation silver handle. It once belonged to a distant relative. Why do I keep it for a period now spanning sixty years? There is a special reason. You see, as a very small boy I participated in a Christmas pageant in our ward. I was privileged to be one of the Three Wise Men. With a bandanna about my head, Mother's Chickering piano bench cover draped over my shoulder, and the black cane in my hand, I spoke my assigned lines: "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."² I don't recall all the words in that pageant, but I vividly remember the feelings of my heart as the three of us "wise men" looked upward and saw a star, journeyed across the stage, found Mary with the young child Jesus, then fell down and worshiped him and opened our treasures and presented gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

I especially liked the fact that we did not return to the evil Herod to betray the baby Jesus, but obeyed God and departed another way.

The years have flown by, the events of a busy life taking their proper places in the hallowed halls of memory, but the Christmas cane continues to occupy a special place in my home; and in my heart is a commitment to Christ.

God-given gifts that endure

For a few moments, may we set aside the catalogs of Christmas with their gifts of exotic description. Let's even turn from the flowers for Mother, the special tie for Father, the cute doll, the train that whistles, the long-awaited bicycle—even the "Star Trek" books and videos—and direct our thoughts to those God-given

gifts that endure. I have chosen from a long list just four:

1. The gift of birth.
2. The gift of peace.
3. The gift of love.
4. The gift of life eternal.

The gift of birth

First, **the gift of birth**. It has been universally bestowed on each of us. Ours was the divine privilege to depart our heavenly home to tabernacles in the flesh and to demonstrate by our lives our worthiness and qualifications to one day return to Him, precious loved ones, and a kingdom called *celestial*. Our mothers and our fathers bestowed this marvelous gift on us. Ours is the responsibility to show our gratitude by the actions of our lives.

My own father, a printer, gave me a copy of a piece he had printed. It was entitled "A Letter from a Father" and concluded with this thought: "Perhaps my greatest hope as a parent is to have such a relationship with you that when the day comes that you look down into the face of your first child, you will feel deep within you the desire to be to your child the kind of parent your dad has tried to be to you. What greater compliment could any man ask? Love, Dad."

Our gratitude to Mother for the gift of birth is equal or beyond that owed to Father. She who looked upon us as "a sweet new blossom of humanity, fresh fallen from God's own home, to flower on earth"³ and cared for our every need, comforted our every cry, and later rejoiced in any of our accomplishments and wept over our failures and disappointments, occupies a singular place of honor in our hearts.

A passage from 3 John sets forth the formula whereby we might express to our parents our gratitude for the gift of birth: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."⁴ Let us so walk. Let us so honor the givers of this priceless gift of birth.

The gift of peace

Second, **the gift of peace**. In the raucous world in which we live, the din of traffic, the blaring commercials of the media, and the sheer demands placed on our time—to say nothing of the problems of the world—cause headache, inflict pain, and sap our strength to cope. The burden of sickness or the grief of mourning a loved one departed brings us to our knees seeking heavenly help. With the ancients we may wonder, "Is there no balm in Gilead?"⁵ There is a certain sadness, even hopelessness, in the verse:

There is never a life without sadness,
There is never a heart free from pain;
If one seeks in this world for true
solace,
He seeks it forever in vain.⁶

He who was burdened with sorrow and acquainted with grief speaks to every troubled heart and bestows the gift of peace: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."⁷

He sends forth His word through the missionaries serving far and wide, proclaiming His gospel of good tidings and His salutation of peace. Vexing questions such as "Whence did I come?" "What is the purpose of my being?" and "Whither go I after death?" are answered by His special servants. Frustration flees, doubt disappears, and wonder wanes when truth is taught in boldness, yet in a spirit of humility, by those who have been called to serve the Prince of Peace—even the Lord Jesus Christ. His gift is bestowed individually: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him."⁸

The passport to peace is the practice of prayer. The feelings of the heart, humbly expressed rather than a mere recitation of words, provide the peace we seek.

In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the wicked King Claudius kneels and tries to pray,

but he rises and says: "My words fly up, my thoughts remain below: Words without thoughts never to heaven go."⁹

Joseph Millett and the gift of peace

One who received and welcomed the gift of peace was Joseph Millett, an early missionary to the Maritime Provinces of Canada, who learned, while there and in his later experiences in life, of the need to rely on heavenly help. An experience which he recalled in his journal is a beautiful illustration of simple yet profound faith:

"One of my children came in, said that Brother Newton Hall's folks were out of bread. Had none that day. I put . . . our flour in [a] sack to send up to Brother Hall's. Just then Brother Hall came in. Says I, 'Brother Hall, how are you [fixed] for flour.' 'Brother Millett, we have none.' 'Well, Brother Hall, there is some in that sack. I have divided [it] and was going to send it to you. Your children told mine that you were out.' Brother Hall began to cry. Said he had tried others. Could not get any. Went to the cedars and prayed to the Lord and the Lord told him to go to Joseph Millett. 'Well, Brother Hall, you needn't bring this back if the Lord sent you for it. You don't owe me for it.' You can't tell how good it made me feel to know that the Lord knew that there was such a person as Joseph Millett."¹⁰

Prayer brought the gift of peace to Nelson Hall and to Joseph Millett.

The gift of love

Third, **the gift of love.** "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" queried the lawyer who spoke to Jesus. Came the prompt reply:

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

"This is the first and great commandment.

"And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."¹¹

On another occasion the Lord taught, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me."¹² The scriptures are filled with the importance of love and its relevance in our lives. The Book of Mormon teaches that charity is the pure love of Christ.¹³ The Master Himself provided an ideal pattern for us to follow. Of Him it was said that He "went about doing good, . . . for God was with him."¹⁴

A few lines from the favorite musical *The Sound of Music* suggest a course of action all might well follow:

A bell is no bell till you ring it,
A song is no song till you sing it,
And love in your heart wasn't put
there to stay—
Love isn't love till you give it away.¹⁵

An awareness of the elderly

A segment of our society desperately yearning for an expression of true love is found among those growing older, and particularly when they suffer from pangs of loneliness. The chill wind of dying hopes and vanished dreams whistles through the ranks of the elderly and those who approach the declining side of the summit of life.

"What they need in the loneliness of their older years is, in part at least, what we needed in the uncertain years of our youth: a sense of belonging, an assurance of being wanted, and the kindly ministrations of loving hearts and hands; not merely dutiful formality, not merely a room in a building, but room in someone's heart and life. . . .

"We cannot bring them back the morning hours of youth. But we can help them live in the warm glow of a sunset made more beautiful by our thoughtfulness, by our provision, and by our active and unfeigned love."¹⁶ So wrote Elder Richard L. Evans some years ago.

At times an awareness of the elderly is brought into focus by a reminder from one ever so young. May I share with you

a Pakistani folktale which illustrates this truth:

An ancient grandmother lived with her daughter and grandson. As she grew frail and feeble, instead of being a help around the house, she became a constant trial. She broke plates and cups, lost knives, spilled water. One day, exasperated because the old woman had broken another precious plate, the daughter sent the grandson to buy his grandmother a wooden plate. The boy hesitated because he knew a wooden plate would humiliate his grandmother. But his mother insisted, so off he went. He returned bringing not one, but two wooden plates.

"I only asked you to buy one," his mother said. "Didn't you hear me?"

"Yes," said the boy. "But I bought the second one so there would be one for you when you get old."

Willie thanks his teacher

Frequently we are inclined to wait a lifetime to express love for the kindness or help given by another even long years before. Perhaps just such an experience prompted George Herbert to say, "Thou that hast given so much to [me], give one thing more . . . a grateful heart."¹⁷

The story is told of a group of men who were talking about people who had influenced their lives and to whom they were grateful. One man thought of a high-school teacher who had introduced him to Tennyson. He decided to write and thank her.

In time, written in a feeble scrawl, came this letter:

"My Dear Willie:

"I can't tell you how much your note meant to me. I am in my eighties, living alone in a small room, cooking my own meals, lonely, and like the last leaf lingering behind. You will be interested to know that I taught school for fifty years, and yours is the first note of appreciation I have ever received. It came on a blue, cold morning, and it cheered me as nothing has for years."

As I read this account, I thought of the treasured line, "The Lord has two homes: heaven and a grateful heart."

Much more could be said pertaining to the gift of love. However, a favorite verse sums up rather well this precious gift:

I have wept in the night
For the shortness of sight
That to somebody's need made me
blind;
But I never have yet
Felt a tinge of regret
For being a little too kind.¹⁸

The gift of life

Fourth, **the gift of life**—even immortality. Our Heavenly Father's plan contains the ultimate expressions of true love. All that we hold dear—even our families, our friends, our joy, our knowledge, our testimonies—would vanish were it not for our Father and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Among the most cherished thoughts and writings in this world is this divine statement of truth: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."¹⁹

This precious Son, our Lord and Savior, atoned for our sins and the sins of all. That memorable night in Gethsemane His suffering was so great, His anguish so consuming that He pleaded, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt."²⁰ Later, on the cruel cross, He died that we might live—and live everlastingly. Resurrection morning was preceded by pain, by suffering in accordance with the divine plan of God. Before Easter there had to be a cross. The world has witnessed no greater gift, nor has it known more lasting love.

Nephi gives to us our charge:

"Ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. . . . If ye shall press forward, feast-

ing upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.

"And now, behold, . . . this is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God."²¹

I close with the words of a revered prophet, even President Harold B. Lee: "Life is God's gift to man. What we do with our life is our gift to God."

May we give generously to Him, as He has so abundantly given to us, by living and loving as He and His Son have so patiently taught, is my earnest prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. See "The Gift of the Magi."
2. Matthew 2:2.
3. Gerald Massey, in John P. Bradley, et al., comp., *The International Dictionary of Thoughts* (Chicago: J. G. Ferguson Publishing Co., 1969), p. 66.
4. 3 John 1:4.
5. Jeremiah 8:22.
6. Author unknown.
7. John 14:27.
8. Revelation 3:20.
9. Act 3, scene 3, lines 97-98.
10. In Eugene England, "Without Purse or Scrip," *New Era*, July 1975, p. 28.

11. Matthew 22:36-39.
12. John 14:21.
13. See Moroni 7:47.
14. Acts 10:38.
15. "Sixteen, Going on Seventeen," from *The Sound of Music*.
16. *Thoughts . . . for One Hundred Days* (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1966), p. 222.
17. In Richard L. Evans, *Richard Evans' Quote Book* (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1971), p. 238.
18. In *Improvement Era*, May 1960, p. 340.
19. John 3:16.
20. Matthew 26:39.
21. 2 Nephi 31:20-21.

The choir sang "Lord, I Would Follow Thee."

President Hinckley

President Thomas S. Monson, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, has spoken to us, followed by the Tabernacle Choir singing "Lord, I Would Follow Thee."

We shall now be pleased to hear from President Howard W. Hunter, President of the Council of the Twelve Apostles.

President Howard W. Hunter

The path of Palm Sunday

Today is the day the Christian world traditionally calls Palm Sunday. It is the anniversary of that momentous occasion nearly two thousand years ago when Jesus of Nazareth, the very Son of God himself, began the ultimate declaration of his divinity and entered the holy city of Jerusalem as the promised Messiah that he was.

Riding on a young donkey in fulfillment of Zechariah's ancient prophecy (see Zechariah 9:9), he approached the temple on a path that the jubilant crowd

lined for him with palm leaves, flowering branches, and some of their own garments, thus carpeting the way properly for the passing of a king. He was their king; these were his subjects. "Hosanna to the Son of David," they shouted. "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest" (Matthew 21:9).

Of course, that path so lovingly lined was soon to lead to an upper room and then to Gethsemane. After stops at the home of Annas, the court of Caiaphas, and the Roman headquarters of Pilate, the path would, of course, lead on to Calvary. But it would not end there. The path