

children. To our dear friends of the Church, please do not let pass this opportunity to receive personal revelation from God. Consider what I have said. Weigh it carefully. Measure it against the things you believe. Hold fast to all that is true, and add to that the fulness of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. Take into account what you have felt as you have listened. You can know if these things are true by asking God. Listen for His answer; then respond to what you feel.

If you will do so, I believe you will come to know as I know that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is God's true church upon the earth. May God bless you, my dear friends, with the peace and joy the gospel gives, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Thomas S. Monson

Widows in Berlin

Many years ago I attended a large gathering of Church members in the city of Berlin, Germany. A spirit of quiet reverence permeated the gathering as an organ prelude of hymns was played. I gazed at those who sat before me. There were mothers and fathers and relatively few children. The majority of those who sat on crowded benches were women about middle age—and alone. Suddenly it dawned on me that perhaps these were widows, having lost their husbands during World War II. My curiosity demanded an answer to my unexpressed thought, so I asked the conducting officer to take a sort of standing roll call. When he asked all those who were widows to please arise, it seemed that half the vast throng stood. Their faces reflected the grim effect of war's cruelty. Their hopes had been shattered, their lives altered, and their future had in a way been taken from

The choir sang "Come, We That Love the Lord."

President Hinckley

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Council of the Twelve Apostles has just spoken to us, and the choir has sung "Come, We That Love the Lord."

President Thomas S. Monson, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, will be our concluding speaker, after which the Tabernacle Choir will sing "Sweet Is the Peace the Gospel Brings." The benediction will then be offered by Elder Neil L. Andersen of the Seventy, and this conference will then be adjourned until two o'clock this afternoon.

them. Behind each countenance was a personal travail of tears. I addressed my remarks to them and to all who have loved, then lost, those most dear.

Faith and sacrifices of a German widow

Frederick W. Babbel, who accompanied Elder Ezra Taft Benson on his postwar visit to Europe to assist the struggling Saints, recounts in his book *On Wings of Faith* one heartrending account. A woman, even the mother of four small children, had been newly widowed. Her husband, young and handsome, whom she loved more than life itself, had been killed during the final days of the frightful battles in their homeland of East Prussia. She and her children were forced to flee to West Germany, a distance of a thousand miles. The weather was mild as they began their long and difficult trek on foot. Constantly being faced with dangers from panicky refugees and marauding

troops was difficult enough, but then came the cold of winter, with its accompanying snow and ice. Her resources were meager; now they were gone. All she had was her strong faith in God and in the gospel as revealed to the latter-day prophet Joseph Smith.

And then one morning the unthinkable happened. She awakened with a chill in her heart. The tiny form of her three-year-old daughter was cold and still, and she realized that death had claimed her. With great effort the mother prepared a shallow grave and buried her precious child.

Death, however, was to be her companion again and again on the journey. Her seven-year-old perished, and then her five-year-old. Her despair was all-consuming. Finally, as she was reaching the end of her travel, the baby died in her arms. She had lost her husband and all her children. She had given up all her earthly goods, her home, and even her homeland.

From the depths of her despair, she knelt and prayed more fervently than she had ever prayed in her life: "Dear Heavenly Father, I do not know how I can go on. I have nothing left—except my faith in thee. I feel amidst the desolation of my soul an overwhelming gratitude for the atoning sacrifice of thy Son, Jesus Christ. I know that because he suffered and died, I shall live again with my family; that because he broke the chains of death, I shall see my children again in the flesh and will have the joy of raising them. Though I do not at this moment wish to live, I will do so, that we may be reunited as a family and return, together, to thee." This prayer, this testimony sustained her until finally she reached Karlsruhe, her destination.

"Where can I turn for peace?"

Though perhaps not so cruel and dramatic, yet equally poignant, are the lives described in the obituaries of our

day and time when the uninvited enemy called death enters the stage of our mortal existence and snatches from our grasp a loving husband or precious wife and, frequently in the young exuberance of life, our children and grandchildren. Death shows no mercy. Death is no respecter of persons, but in its insidious way it visits all. At times it is after long-suffering and is a blessing, while in other instances those in the prime of life are taken by its grasp.

As of old, the heartbroken frequently and silently repeat the ancient question: "Is there no balm in Gilead?"¹ "Why me; why now?" The words of a beautiful hymn provide a partial answer:

Where can I turn for peace? Where
is my solace
When other sources cease to make
me whole?
When with a wounded heart, anger,
or malice,
I draw myself apart, Searching my
soul? . . .

He answers privately, Reaches my
reaching
In my Gethsemane, Savior and
Friend.
Gentle the peace he finds for my be-
seaching.
Constant he is and kind, Love with-
out end.²

Widows in the scriptures

The plight of the widow is a recurring theme through holy writ. Our hearts go out to the widow at Zarephath. Gone was her husband. Consumed was her scant supply of food. Starvation and death awaited. But then came God's prophet with the seemingly brazen command that the widow woman should feed him. Her response is particularly touching: "As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I

am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.”³

The reassuring words of Elijah penetrated her very being:

“Fear not; go and do as thou hast said; but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.

“For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail. . . .

“And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah. . . .

“And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail.”⁴

Like the widow at Zarephath was the widow of Nain. The New Testament of our Lord records a moving and soul-stirring account of the Master’s tender regard for the grieving widow:

“And it came to pass . . . that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people.

“Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her.

“And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not.

“And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.

“And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother.”⁵

Care for widows and orphans

What power, what tenderness, what compassion did our Master and Exemplar demonstrate. We too can bless if we will but follow his noble example. Opportunities are everywhere. Needed are eyes to see the pitiable plight, ears to hear the silent pleadings of a broken

heart, yes, and a soul filled with compassion, that we might communicate not only eye to eye or voice to ear but in the majestic style of the Savior, even heart to heart.

The word *widow* appears to have had a most significant meaning to our Lord. He cautioned his disciples to beware the example of the scribes, who feigned righteousness by their long apparel and their lengthy prayers, but who devoured the houses of widows.⁶

To the Nephites came the direct warning, “I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against . . . those that oppress . . . the widow.”⁷

And to the Prophet Joseph Smith he directed, “The storehouse shall be kept by the consecrations of the church; and widows and orphans shall be provided for, as also the poor.”⁸

The widow’s home is generally not large or ornate. Frequently it is a modest one in size and humble in appearance. Often it is tucked away at the top of the stairs or the back of the hallway and consists of but one room. To such homes he sends you and me.

There may exist an actual need for food, clothing, even shelter. Such can be supplied. Almost always there remains the hope for that special hyacinth to feed the soul.

Go, gladden the lonely, the dreary;
Go, comfort the weeping, the weary;
Go, scatter kind deeds on your way;
Oh, make the world brighter today!⁹

Let us remember that after the funeral flowers fade, the well-wishes of friends become memories, and the prayers offered and words spoken dim in the corridors of the mind. Those who grieve frequently find themselves alone. Missed is the laughter of children, the commotion of teenagers, and the tender, loving concern of a departed companion. The clock ticks more loudly, time

passes more slowly, and four walls do indeed a prison make.

Hopefully all of us may again hear the echo of words spoken by the Master, inspiring us to good deeds: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these . . . , ye have done it unto me."¹⁰

The late Elder Richard L. Evans left for our contemplation and action this admonition:

"We who are [young] should never become so blindly absorbed in our own pursuits as to forget that there are still with us those who will live in loneliness unless we let them share our lives as once they let us share theirs. . . .

"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. Life in its fullness is a loving ministry of service from generation to generation. God grant that those who belong to us may never be left in loneliness."¹¹

A semitrailer filled with fresh fruit

Long years ago a severe drought struck the Salt Lake Valley. The commodities at the storehouse on Welfare Square had not been of their usual quality, nor were they found in abundance. Many products were missing, especially fresh fruit. As I was a young bishop, worrying about the needs of the many widows in my ward, my prayer one evening is especially sacred to me. I pleaded for these widows, who were among the finest women I knew in mortality and whose needs were simple and conservative, because they had no resources on which they might rely.

The next morning I received a call from a ward member, a proprietor of a produce business situated in our ward. "Bishop," he said, "I would like to send a semitrailer filled with oranges, grapefruit, and bananas to the bishops' store-

house to be given to those in need. Could you make arrangements?" Could I make arrangements! The storehouse was alerted, and then each bishop was telephoned and the entire shipment distributed. Bishop Jesse M. Drury, that beloved welfare pioneer and storekeeper, said he had never witnessed a day like it before. He described the occasion with one word: "Wonderful!"

The wife of that generous businessman is today a widow. I know the decision her husband and she made has brought her sweet memories and comforting peace to her soul.

Gratitude to those who care for widows

I express my sincere appreciation to one and all who are mindful of the widow. To the thoughtful neighbors who invite a widow to dinner and to that royal army of noble women, the visiting teachers of the Relief Society, I add, may God bless you for your kindness and your love unfeigned toward her who reaches out and touches vanished hands and listens to voices forever stilled. The words of the Prophet Joseph Smith describe their mission: "I attended by request, the Female Relief Society, whose object is the relief of the poor, the destitute, the widow and the orphan, and for the exercise of all benevolent purposes."¹²

Thank you to thoughtful and caring bishops who ensure that no widow's cupboard is empty, no house unwarmed, no life unblessed. I admire the ward leaders who invite the widows to all social activities, often providing a young Aaronic Priesthood lad to be a special escort for the occasion.

A widow contributes to the missionary fund

Frequently the need of the widow is not one of food or shelter but of feeling a part of ongoing events. President

Bryan Richards of Salt Lake City, now serving as a mission president, brought to my office a sweet widow whose husband had passed away during a full-time mission they were serving. President Richards explained that her financial resources were adequate and that she desired to contribute to the Church's General Missionary Fund the proceeds of two insurance policies on the life of her departed husband. I could not restrain my tears when she meekly advised me, "This is what I wish to do. It is what my missionary-minded husband would like."

The gift was received and entered as a most substantial donation to missionary service. I saw the receipt made in her name, but I believe in my heart it was also recorded in heaven. I invited her and President Richards to follow me to the unoccupied First Presidency Council room in the Church Administration Building. The room is beautiful and peaceful. I asked this sweet widow to sit in the chair usually occupied by our church President. I felt he would not mind, for I knew his heart. As she sat ever so humbly in the large leather chair, she gripped each armrest with a hand and declared, "This is one of the happiest days of my life." It was also such for President Richards and for me.

Children caring for widowed parents

I never travel to work along busy Seventh East in Salt Lake City but what I see in my mind's eye a thoughtful daughter, afflicted with arthritis and carrying in her hand a plate of warm food to her aged mother, who lived across the busy thoroughfare. She has now gone home to that mother who preceded her in passing. But her lesson was not lost on her daughters, who delight their widowed father by cleaning his house each week, inviting him to dinners in their homes, and sharing with him the laughter of good times together, leaving

in that widower's heart a prayer of gratitude for his daughters, the light of his life. Fathers experience loneliness as well as mothers.

Nell at Maytime Manor

One evening at Christmastime my wife and I visited a nursing home in Salt Lake City. We looked in vain for a ninety-five-year-old widow whose memory had become clouded and who could not speak a word. An attendant led us in our search, and we found Nell in the dining room. She had eaten her meal; she was sitting silently, staring into space. She did not show us any sign of recognition. As I reached to take her hand, she withdrew it. I noticed that she held firmly to a Christmas greeting card. The attendant smiled and said, "I don't know who sent that card, but she will not lay it aside. She doesn't speak, but pats the card and holds it to her lips and kisses it." I recognized the card. It was one my wife, Frances, had sent to Nell the week before. We left Maytime Manor more filled with the Christmas spirit than when we entered. We kept to ourselves the mystery of that special card and the life it had gladdened and the heart it had touched. Heaven was nearby.

Pure religion and undefiled before God

We need not wait for Christmas; we need not postpone till Thanksgiving Day our response to the Savior's tender admonition, "Go, and do thou likewise."¹³

As we follow in his footsteps, as we ponder his thoughts and his deeds, as we keep his commandments, we will be blessed. The grieving widow, the fatherless child, and the lonely of heart everywhere will be gladdened, comforted, and sustained through our service, and we will experience a deeper understanding of the words recorded in the Epistle of James: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To

visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."¹⁴

May the peace promised by the Savior be the gift of one and all this Sabbath day and always is my fervent and humble prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Jeremiah 8:22.
2. "Where Can I Turn for Peace?" *Hymns*, no. 129.
3. 1 Kings 17:12.
4. 1 Kings 17:13-16.
5. Luke 7:11-15.
6. See Luke 20:46-47.
7. 3 Nephi 24:5.
8. D&C 83:6.
9. *Deseret Sunday School Songs* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1909), no. 197.
10. Matthew 25:40.
11. Richard L. Evans, *Thoughts for One Hundred Days* (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1966), p. 222.
12. *History of the Church*, 4:567.
13. Luke 10:37.
14. James 1:27.

The choir sang "Sweet Is the Peace the Gospel Brings."

Elder Neil L. Andersen offered the benediction.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

The fifth session of the 164th Semiannual General Conference commenced at 2:00 P.M. on Sunday, October 2, 1994. President Thomas S. Monson, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, conducted this session.

The Tabernacle Choir provided the music, with Jerold Ottley conducting and Richard Elliott at the organ.

President Monson made the following remarks as the meeting began.

President Thomas S. Monson

President Howard W. Hunter, who presides at this conference, has asked me, Brother Monson, to conduct this session.

We welcome you this afternoon to the fifth and concluding session of the 164th Semiannual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

We note that Elders Jeffrey R. Holland, Ronald E. Poelman, and Durrel A. Woolsey are seated on the stand in the Assembly Hall; and Elders Loren C. Dunn and Ben B. Banks are in the Joseph Smith Memorial Building.

We send our greetings and blessings to members of the Church and to many friends everywhere, who are participating in these proceedings by radio, television, cable, or satellite transmission.

The Tabernacle Choir, directed by Jerold Ottley and accompanied by Richard Elliott, will provide the music for this session. The choir will begin this service by singing "In Hymns of Praise." The invocation will then be offered by Elder James M. Paramore of the Seventy.

The choir sang "In Hymns of Praise."
Elder James M. Paramore offered the invocation.

President Monson

Thank you, Brother Paramore.

The choir will now sing "Dedication." Elder James E. Faust of the Council of Twelve Apostles will then be our first speaker.

The choir sang "Dedication."
