

Confirmed in Faith

Aileen H. Clyde

Now let us rejoice since, as the hymn declares, we are no more strangers. We sing as an expression of our faith in God (particularly tonight it is his daughters who sing), of our knowledge that Christ and His people shall ever be one.

“And righteousness will I send down out of heaven; and truth will I send forth out of the earth, to bear testimony of mine Only Begotten; ... and righteousness and truth will I cause to sweep the earth ... , to gather out mine elect from the four quarters of the earth, unto a place which I shall prepare, ... and it shall be called Zion” (Moses 7:62).

While the Zion where all walk with God is not before us yet, the way to Zion through faith on Jesus Christ is before us. We live among evidence of the promise of the scripture that righteousness and truth are in the earth and that Christ has come to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

Relief Society women gathered here tonight and organized in many places in the four quarters of the earth are part of the evidence that righteousness and truth are sweeping forward in the world, because of their faith in Jesus Christ. Our Savior goes before us and invites us to a covenant relationship with Him to help us find our way. In John 15, verse 10, we read, “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in His love.”

The reciprocal nature of our relationship to God is a basic truth of that relationship. Christ does not withhold His part; and we are here to learn better the ways to give our part. As our Savior knew and returned His Father’s love, He gained the strength to do all that He was commanded. And then came the promise that is ours when we abide in Christ and allow His words to abide in us.

“These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.

“This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you” (John 15:11–12).

Our Heavenly Father and His Son expect us to rely on each other in relationships of love and trust by following the pattern they have shown. Every provision is made to help us find the necessary spiritual strength. In the Doctrine and Covenants we read:

“To some it is given by the Holy Ghost to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that he was crucified for the sins of the world.

“To others it is given to believe on their words, that they also might have eternal life if they continue faithful” (D&C 46:13–14).

We are promised, then, that we grow spiritually as we believe in the words of those who know, those whose faith has produced the capacity to endure and to move forward. Faith is power in us and gives us the ability to do. Many of us have seen examples of such faith in our lives, but often they slip by us quickly. In 1839 Mary Fielding Smith, wife of Hyrum Smith, wrote a letter to her brother Joseph Fielding, and we have it in the record. It frames

with clarity the reciprocal nature of our relationships with one another and with God in the ways we are taught in the scriptures.

“Dear Brother:

“... You have, I suppose, heard of the imprisonment of my dear husband, with his brother Joseph, Elder Rigdon, and others, who were kept from us nearly six months; and I suppose no one felt the painful effects of their confinement more than myself. I was left in a way that called for the exercise of all the courage and grace I possessed. My husband was taken from me by an armed force, at a time when I needed, in a particular manner, the kindest care and attention of such a friend, instead of which, the care of a large family was suddenly and unexpectedly left upon myself, and, in a few days after, my dear little Joseph F. was added to the number. Shortly after his birth I took a severe cold, which brought on chills and fever; this, together with the anxiety of mind I had to endure, threatened to bring me to the gates of death. I was at least four months entirely unable to take any care either of myself or child; but the Lord was merciful in so ordering things that my dear sister could be with me. Her child was five months old when mine was born; so she had strength given her to nurse them both.

“You will also have heard of our being driven, as a people, from the State, [Missouri] and from our homes; this happened during my sickness, and I had to be removed more than two hundred miles, chiefly on my bed. I suffered much on my journey; but in three or four weeks after we arrived in Illinois, I began to amend, and my health is now as good as ever. ... We are now living in Commerce, on the bank of the great Mississippi river. The situation is very pleasant; you would be much pleased to see it. How long we may be permitted to enjoy it I know not; but the Lord knows what is best for us. I feel but little concerned about where I am, if I can keep my mind staid upon God; for, you know in this there is perfect peace. I believe the Lord is overruling all things for our good. I suppose our enemies look upon us with astonishment and disappointment” (quoted in Carol Cornwall Madsen, *In Their Own Words: Women and the Story of Nauvoo* [1994], 98–99).

Mary Fielding Smith collected every resource available to her to manage the searing events that filled her daily life. While her moving and articulate letter may be rare, her experience with God isn't. Today, everywhere I go in the Church I see similar dignity exemplified by women and by men whose trials differ in circumstance but are similar in the courage and grace they require.

God's care for us has caused Him, by revelation, to provide not only the means for our salvation, but he provides for ways we can help each other meet the challenges to that salvation. The Lord's organization for women is here so we may bring relief to those who need us. Such important work demands our understanding that to God all things are spiritual (see D&C 29:34). As women in the Church, we have knowledge many others lack; consequently we remind ourselves our work is not dedicated to triviality or entertainment. We have all been blessed with the truths we feel when we sing “I Am a Child of God” (*Hymns*, no. 301), but we need to remember in our hearts that our experiences here require us also to be adults of God. Again, the scripture verifies the maturing required of us: “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became [an adult], I put away childish things” (1 Cor. 13:11). We do not seek to lose the fresh teachableness of children; we seek to claim steadfastness and the courage to act on our hard-won convictions.

We have the opportunity to serve in a time when many among us are lonely or addicted, abused or abandoned, sincerely seeking or full of faith. The ways Relief Society can teach and build are long established, but they have

no momentum without the gifts and offerings of individual women day by day. Our external persecutors may be very different from Mary Fielding Smith's, but they are real. Many feel they are trying, too often in isolation, to survive an avalanche of pressing duties. Some lament their loss of kinship with others or their sense of direction to the future. These feelings, indeed all tribulations, are common to our humanity; but we find there are antidotes as we develop our personal and shared faith and demonstrate our faith by action.

Earlier this year I was greatly moved as I participated in a meeting in Lagos, Nigeria, in a building with spare concrete walls and a heavy, flat tin roof. Relief Society leaders with their priesthood advisers had been counseling together there for more than two hours. We had worked together to better understand the ways that could be employed to give strength to their important callings, to build their faith, and to help conquer the tribulation that surrounded them in that sprawling city.

As we finished the closing hymn and said an amen to a heartfelt prayer, a thunderous roar filled the room. It was rain. The deluge on the tin roof made any parting conversation impossible. Water was already coursing through the streets and splashing immediately against the door. Our meetings had been scheduled in the afternoon so that most could be home by dark. Now, as we sat waiting and wordless because of the din, it was obvious they not only faced the heightened dangers of darkness, but they would be thoroughly drenched as they returned to their homes. I thought of Alma as he waded through tribulation (see Alma 8:14–15), and then I remembered the blessing that came to him. I was struck for the moment with the somewhat similar conditions in Ammonihah for Alma and for our Saints in Lagos, Nigeria. An angel had said to Alma, “Lift up thy head and rejoice, ... for thou hast been faithful in keeping the commandments of God from the time which thou receivedst thy first message from him” (Alma 8:15).

There were those in that clattering room who were going forth, as Alma did, to teach and help save others through the power of their faith. When the rain did not yield, they rose, one by one, two or three at a time. We embraced or shook hands solemnly, and they went forth. They were confirmed in their new knowledge that God's matchless power, His mercy and long-suffering, prevented their being cut off and consigned to endless misery and woe (see Hel. 5:12). They had new courage to face, with hope, their immediate journey and their eternal future. They gave me courage too.

I testify that we belong to God as He is our creator. His Son's Atonement vouchsafes our eternal life at great cost because of great love. I know these things are true. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.