

“And the Greatest of These Is Love”

GORDON B. HINCKLEY

I so greatly appreciated that music. I have never heard a rendering of “I Need Thee Every Hour” quite like that, nor one that has touched me more deeply. I did not know that it was Indian Week at BYU, or I might have spoken of these wonderful people. As it is, I shall speak to them, and to you also wonderful people.

It is so refreshing to stand before you. You give life, vitality, and beauty to the present, and assurance to the future. I always come here with a feeling of inadequacy. But today I feel a little more confident. At the close of a recent stake conference a teenage girl handed me a sealed envelope which I opened on the plane on the way home. It contained a letter that read in part:

Dear Brother Hinckley:

I just wanted to thank you for coming to our stake for this conference. That was really a neat message. . . . I wanted to know if you know Paul Dunn. He’s my favorite speaker, and he’s the one that dedicated our building. I haven’t heard from him for a while, but you are every bit as good a speaker as he is.

Now, having established my credentials, and having sought the direction of the Holy Spirit, I wish to talk about something in which all of you are interested—something for which

all of you long, which you need, and without which the world can indeed be a lonely and a dreary place. I do so because this is Valentine’s Day.

On this day, when I was a little boy, we traded paper hearts at school, and at night we dropped them at the doors of our friends, stamping on the porch and then running in the dark to hide. Sometimes we would tie a fishing line to a valentine, and when the would-be receiver would go to pick it up we would pull the string. That happens in life with some of us.

Almost without exception these valentines had printed on their face the words, “I love you.” I have since come to know that love is more than a paper heart. It is the very essence of life. It is the pot of gold at the end of a rainbow. But it is not at the end of a rainbow; it is at the beginning, and from it springs the beauty that arches across the sky on a stormy day. It is the security for which children weep, the meat and drink of youth, the adhesive that

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binds marriage and the lubricant that prevents devastating friction in the home; it is the peace of old age, the sunlight of hope shining through death. How impoverished are those who lack it, and how rich those who have it!

For most of you here today, it is one of the reasons for your presence on campus. You are here because of the love of your parents, whose interest is your present and future happiness. You say you are here to gain an education, and I hope that is true. But in your hearts you know you are also here to find a companion, that someone with whom you hope you can fall in love, later marry, and then live happily with forever after. This is not an idle, idyllic dream. It happens. I know it happens; I have experienced it. And you know it happens and you hope and pray it will happen to you.

I am one who believes that love, like faith, is a gift of God. I agree with Pearl Buck, who said: "Love cannot be forced, love cannot be coaxed and teased. It comes out of heaven, unasked and unsought" (*The Treasure Chest*, p. 165).

Some of you have taken classes to prepare you the better for that hoped-for time. They may help qualify you, and each of us needs all the help he can get. But I am inclined to agree with Sydney Harris, the columnist, who wrote:

One of the grand errors we tend to make when we are young is supposing that a person is a bundle of qualities, and we add up the individual's good and bad qualities, like a bookkeeper working on debits and credits.

If the balance is favorable, we may decide to take the jump [into marriage]. . . . The world is full of unhappy men and women who married their mates because . . . it seemed to be a good investment.

Love, however, is not an investment; it is an adventure. And when the marriage turns out to be as dull and comfortable as a sound investment, the disgruntled party soon turns elsewhere for adventure, . . .

Ignorant people are always saying, "I wonder what he sees in her," not realizing that what he sees in her (and what no one else can see in her) is the secret essence of love.

Entering a marriage calmly and rationally is like dancing a bacchanal calmly and rationally; it is a contradiction in terms. It takes into account everything except what is important—the spirit.

[*"Love and Marriage," Deseret News, 18 October 1977*]

I had a friend who decided that his would be a scientific marriage—one built on the qualities of his wife, rather than his feelings for her. He lived in California in a large ward and a large stake where there were many attractive girls his own age. In the pursuit of his quest he made a chart. At the top of each column he set down some worthwhile quality such as beauty, education, ambition, a wealthy father, and so forth. Then down the side of his chart he wrote the names of all the girls he knew. He then graded each, and rated them in numerical order—1, 2, 3, 4, and so on. He proceeded to make his conquest.

Expectantly, he called Number 1; she refused to go out with him. Number 2 also had an excuse. Number 3 gambled on one date, the last; and he ended up marrying Number 4. A year later someone sent me a copy of the local paper in which my friend gave notice that he no longer would be responsible for debts incurred by his wife. Divorce followed shortly after that. Forty years have passed and my once-burned and loveless friend has never remarried.

I think of two other friends of about the same vintage, a boy and a girl. I knew them in the years of high school and university. He was a boy from a country town, plain in appearance, without money or apparent promise. He had grown up on a farm, and if he had any quality that was attractive it was the capacity to work. He carried bologna sandwiches in a brown paper bag for his lunch and swept the

school floors to pay his tuition. But with all of his rustic appearance, he had a smile and a personality that seemed to sing of goodness. She was a city girl who had come out of a comfortable home, but she would never have qualified for a beauty contest. Her face was freckled, but she made the most of what she had in the quiet but attractive manner of her dressing and in the way she fixed her hair.

Something of magic took place between them. They fell in love. No one could understand why. There were far more promising boys for her and far more beautiful girls who might have interested him. But these two laughed and danced and studied together through those years. They married when people wondered how they could ever earn enough to stay alive. He struggled through his professional school and came out near the top of his class. She scrimped and saved and worked and prayed. She encouraged and sustained and when things were really tough she said quietly, "Somehow we'll make it." Buoyed by her faith in him, he kept going through those difficult years. Their children came, and together they loved them and nourished them and gave them the security that came of their own example of love for and loyalty to one another. Now forty-five years and more have passed. Their children are grown and are a credit to them, to the Church, and to the communities in which they live.

Recently, while riding a plane from New York, I walked down the aisle in the semi-darkness of the cabin and saw a woman, white-haired, her head on her husband's shoulder as she dozed and his hand clasped warmly about hers. He was awake and recognized me. She awakened when we began to talk. They, too, were returning from New York, where he had delivered a paper before one of the great learned societies of the nation. He said little about it, but she proudly spoke of the honors accorded him. Forty-five years ago people

without understanding had asked what he saw in her and what she saw in him.

I thought of that as I returned to my seat on the plane. And I said to myself, their friends of those days saw only a farm boy from the country and a smiling girl with freckles on her nose. But these two saw in each other love, loyalty, peace, faith, and the future. Call it chemistry if you will; maybe there was a little of that, but there was much more. There was rather a flowering of something divine, planted there by that Father who is our God. In their school days they had lived worthy of that flowering. They had lived with virtue and faith, with appreciation and respect for self and one another. In the years of their difficult professional and economic struggles, they had found their greatest earthly strength in their companionship. Now in age they were finding their peace, their quiet satisfaction together. And beyond that they were assured of an eternity of joyful association under covenants long since made and promises long since given in the house of the Lord.

Reflecting on the picture I had just seen of these two happy people, there came into my mind these lines read long ago from Robert Louis Stevenson:

*Trusty, dusky, vivid, true,
With eyes of gold and bramble-dew,
Steel true and blade straight
The great Artificer made my mate.*

*Honor, anger, valor, fire,
A love that life could never tire,
Death quench, or evil stir,
The mighty Master gave to her.*

*Teacher, tender comrade, wife,
A fellow-farer true through life,
Heart-whole and soul-free,
The August Father gave to me.
[Elbert Hubbard's Scrapbook, p. 69]*

I could wish nothing better for each of you, my dear young friends, than love—the companionship of one dearer than any friend; someone to be deliriously excited over and to be happy with; someone to stir within you the very best that is there; someone to grow more appreciative of, more tender toward, more grateful for, more a part of as one year becomes another and life moves toward eternity. May the Lord answer your prayers with love, the kind that will always express itself in concern not for self but for your beloved companion.

And now I should like to step quickly beyond that boy-and-girl, husband-and-wife, father-and-mother relationship to a greater love for God and others. I quote:

Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying,

Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

Jesus said unto him, 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 neighbor as thyself.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. [Matthew 22:35–40]

This is the basic essence of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Listen to these great words of Paul:

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not [love], I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

And though I have the gift of prophesy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not [love], I am nothing. . . .

[Love] never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. [1 Corinthians 13:1–2, 8]

First, a word on love of neighbor. Who is my neighbor? Read again—read periodically, my brethren and sisters—the parable of the Good Samaritan. And also read again the words of the Lord concerning that day of judgment when the King shall

say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye, blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink, I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

[And he shall reply,] . . . Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. [Matthew 25:34–40]

I heard a man of prominence say the other day, “I have amended the language of my prayers. Instead of saying, ‘Bless the poor and the sick and the needy,’ I now say, ‘Father, show me how to help the poor and the sick and the needy, and give me resolution to do so.’”

In this, my brethren and sisters, lies the great challenge we face in our hurried, self-centered lives. Years ago I read the story of a young woman who went into a rural area as a schoolteacher. Among those in her class was a girl who had failed before and who was failing again. She could not read. She came from a family without means to take her to a larger city for examination to determine her problem. Sensing that the difficulty might lie with the girl’s eyes, the young teacher arranged to take her at her own expense to have her eyes tested.

A deficiency was discovered that could be corrected with glasses, and these the teacher purchased from her own purse. An entire new world opened to that girl as for the first time in her life she saw clearly the words before her. The salary of that country teacher was meager, but out of the little she had she made an investment that completely changed the life of a failing student; and in so doing she found a new dimension in her own life, an investment from which dividends came constantly as the years passed.

Every returned missionary in this hall could recount experiences of losing self in the service of others, and while doing so could add that it was the most rewarding time of his or her life. How is it that when we come home we have so much difficulty holding on to that spirit of love of neighbor?

Love is the only force that can compose the differences between people that can bridge the chasms of bitterness and animosity that so frequently and violently separate us. I call to mind these telling lines of Edwin Markham:

*He drew a circle that shuts me out—
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But love and I had the wit to win:
We drew a circle that took him in.
[The Book of American Poetry, p. 265]*

In St. Martin's Place in the city of London, across from the National Gallery, is a beautiful statue of a woman in a nurse's uniform. It is erected to the memory of Edith Cavell, the English nurse who shielded wounded Allied soldiers from the enemy. She was caught and summarily executed. The inscription on her monument reads: "Brussels Dawn, October 12, 1915. Patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness toward anyone."

He who most beautifully taught this everlasting truth was the Son of God, the one perfect example and teacher of love. His very

coming to earth was an expression of his Father's love. "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" (John 3:16).

I listened recently to the masterful address on the Atonement delivered at this pulpit by President Marion G. Romney in which he spoke of the manifestation of love by the Son of God who gave his life that all men might live. The Savior spoke prophetically of his sacrifice and of the love that induced it when he declared: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

And so, on this day when we think of love in a secular sense, I wish also to remind you of its greater import in a sacred sense. If the world in which we live is to improve, that process must begin with a change in the hearts of men, with an upward looking beyond self to love for God, given with all of one's heart, with all of one's soul, with all of one's mind.

The Lord has declared in modern revelation, "If your eye be single to my glory, your whole bodies shall be filled with light, and there shall be no darkness in you" (D&C 88:67). As we look with love to him, as we serve with an eye single to his glory, there will go from us the darkness of sin, the darkness of selfishness, the darkness of pride. There will come an increased love for our Eternal Father and for his Beloved Son, our Savior and our Redeemer. There will come a greater sense of service toward our fellowmen—a little less of thinking of our own selfish pursuits, a little more of reaching out to others. And in our own individual lives as we seek for love and marriage, there will be a higher power on whom we can call for help and direction, a stronger resolution to live more worthy of a choice and wonderful companion with whom we may walk the way of immortality and eternal life. For this I humbly pray in behalf of each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.