

Taking upon Us His Name

ARDETH G. KAPP

To you student body officers who have just taken upon you the oath of office to uphold the constitution of the Associated Students of Brigham Young University and to sustain and promote the standards of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I compliment you. With that promise and commitment, may I remind you of the tremendous impact that your example can have as you bring honor and recognition to this great institution and the name Brigham Young University.

Premortal Commitments

This year will provide for each of you a time to magnify measurably your opportunities to keep the commitments that you made before you came here to this mortal sphere.

Elder John A. Widtsoe has given us the following insight regarding those commitments that we all made. He says:

In our preexistent state, in the day of the great council, we made a certain agreement with the Almighty. The Lord proposed a plan conceived by him. We accepted it. Since the plan is intended for all men, we became partners to the salvation of every person under the plan. . . . We went into a partnership with the Lord. The working out of that plan became then not merely

the Father's work, and the Son's work but also our work. The least of us, the humblest, is in partnership with the Almighty in achieving the purpose of the eternal plan of salvation. ["Lesson Ten, The Worth of Souls," Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine, October 1934, 25:189, quoted in R. W. Doxey, The Latter-day Prophets and the Doctrine and Covenants (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1963), 1:33]

Relating to today's happenings, this agreement might even be considered as an oath of office. And what does it mean to be in partnership and to take upon us a name?

Shelly's Questions

Some years ago in the early spring, I took little Shelly's hand in mine, and for hours we carefully picked our way from one rock to the next along the creek bed shaded by some tall trees. The gurgling water was like a musical accompaniment to the dance we were creating as we would take a step, hesitate, take another, and then wait a moment to secure our balance.

Ardeth G. Kapp was coordinator of Student Leadership Development at Brigham Young University when this devotional address was given on 5 May 1981.

Before long, we were drawn to an open meadow where some large cottonwood trees had been recently cut. Making my way through the tall grass, I held Shelly's hand in mine as she cautiously placed one foot ahead of the other, walking the full length of the tree and back again. We noticed in that springtime tender green shoots forcing their way through the earthy floor and the winter snow receding toward the mountain peaks. It seemed as though all of nature bore evidence of God's creations and his love for us.

Our afternoon activities continued until the evening breeze reminded us that our special day was coming to a close. Approaching the narrow, steep garden path leading to my home, I let go Shelly's hand, allowing her to go first. Our hands struck together for a moment. A bond had formed from the warmth of the day through our shared adventures.

Just before reaching the clearing near the house, we stopped. Bending down, I lifted Shelly up to see into a little nest built by a robin in the branch of a tree.

At the close of this memorable day, before tucking my little niece (whom my sister shares with me) into bed, we knelt together while she expressed her own thanks which included the creek, the slippery rocks, the big tree, and the robin's nest. Feeling a renewed appreciation for those same wonderful blessings, I tucked the covers around her and bent down for a good night kiss. Reaching up with both arms around my neck and pulling me close to her, Shelly whispered, "I wish we were in the same family."

"Shelly, my dear," I quickly explained, "we are in the same family."

"No, I mean the very same family. My last name is Larsen, and your last name is Kapp, and that isn't the same. I mean if you were my sister and we had the very same last name."

Even though she was very young, I felt that she might sense the security of our eternal relationship if I could awaken within her a great eternal truth. "Shelly, we really are in the very same family. You see, we are all our Heavenly Father's children, every one of us, and that makes us in

one great family. We are brothers and sisters, and Jesus is our Brother, too, our Elder Brother."

"Then, what is Jesus' last name?" she asked. "Shelly, we know our Savior as Jesus the Christ." With the pure innocence of youth, she began to make us all one family by securing this relationship as she linked my first name with the surname "The Christ."

"Oh, no, my dear. We don't put our names together like that."

"But why not?" she asked.

Wanting her to be aware of the sacredness of our relationship with the Savior, I tried to explain. "I guess maybe it's because sometimes we are not good enough. I don't feel worthy yet."

With that, she raised up on her little elbow. "What do you do that's wrong? Why don't you stop doing it, and then we can all be in the same family? We can all use his name."

As I pondered the answer to her simple questions, I heard in my mind words as though I was hearing them for the first time. And yet, it had been only two days since I had attended sacrament meeting, where I had listened to the same words. I had heard them with my ears often before, but now it seemed different. It was as though I was hearing them with my whole heart and soul:

That they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son, and always remember him, and keep his commandments which he has given them. [D&C 20:77]

Wasn't this the very thing that we were talking about—the responsibility of taking upon oneself that sacred name and committing to try always to remember him and keep his commandments?

Meaning of the Sacrament

While Shelly seemed secure and satisfied with the explanation given her at that time, over the years I have searched for a deeper understanding of this sacred sacramental ordinance in which we renew our covenant each week to take upon ourselves his name. And while that usually occurs on Sunday, what does it mean on weekdays? What

difference does it make to a child, a youth, or an adult? How does it affect how we live in the summer, the winter, the fall? Should it? Can we afford to consider this sacred ordinance passively and allow it to become routine in nature?

From the writings of C. S. Lewis we read,

Active habits are strengthened by repetition but passive ones are weakened. The more often [one] feels without acting, the less he will be able ever to act, and, in the long run, the less he will be able to feel. [The Screwtape Letters (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p. 70]

Jesus Christ came into the world—

to be crucified for the world, and to bear the sins of the world, and to sanctify the world, and to cleanse it from all unrighteousness;

That through him all might be saved. [D&C 76:41–42]

It was Christ who suffered and died to atone for us. There is no possible way we can ransom ourselves. It was in the Garden of Gethsemane that his sufferings were beyond all mortal comprehension, that the weight of our sins caused him to feel such agony, pain, and heartbreak that he bled from every pore as he suffered, both body and spirit. When we see in our minds by the gift of the Spirit the reality of Gethsemane, it is his great love for us that gives us the strength to struggle and suffer in our small way to overcome our sins.

Can we possibly comprehend such love? It is this atonement that can, if we will just do our part, ransom us, qualify us, redeem us, save us, and exalt us. Our part, then, is to accept Christ's atonement by repenting of our sins, being baptized, receiving the Holy Ghost, and obeying all the commandments.

We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel. [Third Article of Faith]

When we became members of his Church at the time of baptism, we covenanted with the Savior to take upon ourselves his name. Do we *remember*

that baptismal covenant every day—and do what we really want to do in relation to that important event in our lives?

Reminders

Not long ago while I was sitting on the stand during the closing session of a youth conference, just as the young priest conducting the meeting rose to his feet to bring the meeting to a close, Kathy, sitting next to me, jumped up and unhesitatingly slipped in front of the young man, took her place at the pulpit, faced the audience, raised both hands in front of her with outstretched fingers, and said, "I'll bet you're all wondering why I've been wearing this ugly green nail polish." A soft ripple could be heard across the audience, and I realized that I was not the only one sharing that curiosity.

"Well," she said, "it's like this: I knew my responsibilities as one of the leaders of this conference were big. I knew I had some real challenges ahead, and I didn't want to be sorry after the chance was gone that I didn't do what I really wanted to do.

"You see, I needed something that would remind me of what I really wanted to do and help me through the things I didn't want to do. So I thought of a plan. And it worked! You see," she went on, "I wanted something that would remind me of what I really wanted to make myself do. I knew my fingernails would always be there, and if they were green, I would be sure to notice them." After giving further details and bearing a strong testimony of the joy that comes when you do what you should, she took her seat. From this insight I was reminded of the message of the apostle Paul when he was speaking to the Corinthians and talking to them about their ways. He said:

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. [1 Corinthians 13:11]

Kathy had helped us all to understand the importance of reminders, but it was the combined voices of youth singing the closing song, resounding like a sacred sermon, that brought forth new

appreciation for sacred reminders, as these wonderful young people sang:

*I marvel that he would descend from his throne divine
To rescue a soul so rebellious and proud as mine;
That he should extend his great love unto such as I,
Sufficient to own, to redeem, and to justify.*
[Charles H. Gabriel, *Hymns*, no. 80]

You and I and Shelly—all of us—have the sacrament, a holy priesthood ordinance that helps remind us of the atonement of the Savior; it helps us keep focused on our daily progress toward exaltation, to remind us of the things we really want to do and to help us through the things we don't want to do. It is a precious and sacred reminder—not just on Sunday, but on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, spring, summer, and fall, when we're on the mountain peaks of our lives, and also when we're in the valleys. What is true for Shelly and you and me is that our Savior loves us very much.

Active Participation

Speaking of the Son of God, Alma, in the Book of Mormon, had this to say:

And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind: . . . he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people. . . .

And he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities. [Alma 7:11–12]

President Marion G. Romney's insight has made a change in my life regarding the opportunity that is mine to partake of the sacrament. May I share it with you:

Now, partaking of the sacrament is not to be a mere passive experience. We are not to remember the Lord's suffering and death only as we may remember some purely secular historical event. Participating in the sacrament service is meant to be a vital and a spiritualizing experience. Speaking of it, the Savior said:

And it shall be a testimony unto the Father that ye do always remember me (3 Nephi 18:7).

Then President Romney continued:

In order to testify, one's mind has to function, and it must be concentrated upon the thing to be testified. And we are not only to partake of the emblems of the sacrament in remembrance of the Redeemer, testifying that we do always remember him, but we are also thereby to witness unto the Father that we are willing to take upon us the name of his Son and that we will keep his commandments. . . .

Now there is a doctrine abroad in the world today which teaches that the physical emblems of the sacrament are transformed into the flesh and blood of Jesus. We do not teach such doctrine, for we know that any transformation which comes from the administration of the sacrament takes place in the souls of those who understandingly partake of it. It is the participating individuals who are affected, and they are affected in a most marvelous way, for they are given the Spirit of the Lord to be with them. [Conference Reports, April 1946, pp. 39–40]

At those very times, brothers and sisters, when you and I feel least comfortable about carrying his holy name and have the keenest sense of our imperfections—those moments when the flesh is weak, and our spirit suffers disappointment, knowing what we can become, we might feel a sense of withdrawing, a pulling away, a feeling of needing to set aside for a time at least that divine relationship with the Savior, until we are more worthy—at such moments, the offer is there to accept the great gift of the atonement even before we change. When you feel the need to pull away, will you reach out to him? Instead of feeling the need to resist, will you submit to his will?

It is in our struggles, while striving to qualify, that our spirits reach out in greater humility and gratitude, and we are better prepared to receive the gift because we so desperately need it—in fact, we must have it if we are to receive our eternal rewards.

A Precious Gift

When my father was in the last stages of stomach cancer, his body wasting away—then less than 100 pounds—his spirit growing in strength every single day, he shared with me his new insights from that perspective.

“It is a fact,” he bore witness, “that the body and spirit are separate. When this process of separation is witnessed firsthand,” he said with conviction and even enthusiasm, “the meaning of eternal life and the resurrection takes on a new dimension of understanding. It is like discovering a precious gift you’ve held in your possession all this time but never unwrapped; and then the time comes when you open it, and you’re more ready to fully appreciate the divine nature of the gift because you are prepared to use it for the purpose for which it was intended.”

The purpose of the sacramental covenant is always in force. That gift becomes more precious when we don’t leave it wrapped, but rather prepare ourselves to use it for the purpose for which it was intended. I would say now to Shelly, “Yes, my dear, put my name with the Savior’s.” He said we could. He wants us to feel comfortable carrying his name.

We must come to the sacramental altar hungry—a spiritual hunger and thirst for righteousness. It is a time for self-evaluation, a time to rectify our courses, if necessary, and to make right our lives. It is a time and place for us to judge ourselves and come to better understand the magnitude of that sacred divine gift and the reality of being allowed to have his Spirit with us always to direct every act of our lives.

I believe that each new day can be faced with greater anticipation and purpose when we are reminded of the words of Elder John A. Widtsoe:

There is a spiritual meaning of all human acts and earthly events. . . . No man is quite so happy, I think, as he who backs all his labors by . . . a spiritual interpretation and understanding of the acts of life. A piece of silver always has a certain value as it passes from hand to hand; it is weighed and we sell it in the marketplace; but, when that piece of silver is coined into a dollar, it receives the stamp of government service; it becomes

a coin of the realm, and it moves from hand to hand to accomplish the work of the realm. So, every act of man, the moment it is fitted into the great plan, the plan of salvation, receives spiritual coinage, and passes from hand to hand, from mind to mind, to accomplish the great work of God. [Conference Reports, April 1922, p. 96–97]

Partnership with the Savior

As we gradually move to that spiritual level, we will begin to experience that partnership to which we agreed in our premortal experience—to help to bring salvation and eternal life to everyone under the plan.

When Christ becomes our constant companion, it will make our whole day different, and with this Spirit reflected in our language, in our daily work, at school, on the highway, in the marketplace, slowly, day by day, our conduct will become more unselfish, our relationships more tender, our desire to serve more constant, and we will find ourselves going about doing good. Always. We will have taken upon us not only his name, but his image in our countenances also (see Alma 5:14).

This experiment has been tried before, even in Christ’s lifetime. A few men were admitted to the inner circle of friendship and, day by day, his first disciples became more mellow and softened and began to grow spiritually with power and strength and influence.

For the apostle Paul, the process was more dramatic. On the road to Damascus he met the Savior, and from that time his words, his deeds, his career, his daily walk were different.

Have we experienced this encounter on our Damascus road? Or maybe in a less dramatic way? When it happens we will be allowed to witness miracles. We will better understand them; in fact, we will participate in them. Lives will be changed when we begin to see each other more as our Savior sees us. We will want to teach each other the way he would teach us. We will yearn for the spirituality to bear testimony of the things to which he bears testimony. And when we meet, it will be as someone said: “We will not just exchange words; what we will exchange is souls.” Not just with our friends and loved ones, but with

every person for whose eternal welfare we share a responsibility. With his Spirit we will be allowed to see things—not as the world sees them, but more as he would see them. We will learn to hearken to the voice of the Spirit.

Influence of the Spirit

President Romney, in speaking to a group of sisters who were being released from their callings in the Church a few years ago, said to us in part, “I pray that the Lord will help you to live every day so that you can have the Spirit of the Lord with you. It is a wonderful thing to try to know and to try to live so that you can hear and respond to the voice of the Lord. That’s where the comfort comes in this life. Hearken to the voice of the Spirit, and have the discernment to know what the Spirit tells you. Then have the courage to follow that counsel.”

One day I witnessed evidence of the Spirit and the courage to follow the counsel. It was in a second-grade elementary classroom. The student teacher held the children captive with her storytelling skills. In great detail, she told of a cross old man whose name was Mr. Black. In contrast, the account was given in similar detail of a Mr. Brown, who was kind and thoughtful and loved by everyone. At the conclusion of the story, the teacher asked the children, “How many of you would like to have Mr. Brown for a neighbor?” Every hand in the room was raised. Then, almost as an afterthought, she asked the question, “And is there anyone who would like to have Mr. Black for a neighbor?”

A little boy in a faded green shirt near the back of the room began to raise his hand, bringing a ripple of quiet amusement from the children. Hesitating only briefly, he looked around at his friends and still mustered the courage to hold his hand high and dare to stand alone in his difference. When called on for an explanation of his single vote, he spoke in a soft tone. “Well,” he said, “I’d like Mr. Black to be my neighbor because if he was my neighbor, my mom would make a cake for me to take to him, and then he wouldn’t be that way anymore.” A hush fell over the room. Everyone felt something wonderful that they

couldn’t explain. A little child broke the silence like a benediction: “Oh . . . I wish I’d said that.”

We had all made a quick decision about who would be the best neighbor, but only one—just one—had a spirit within, the discernment that allowed him to see what might be.

Another day I witnessed the need for the Spirit to help guide the service that was being performed by well-meaning neighbors. A widow lady said to me, “I don’t need more food. My freezer is literally full of the neighbors’ cakes and pies and goodies. But I need for someone to invite me to go to Temple Square with them and their children to see the Christmas lights. You don’t really see the lights without the children.”

Sometimes it’s cake, but sometimes it isn’t. It is the Spirit that will help us customize our service.

Change of Heart

As President Kimball once said, “God does notice us, and he watches over us. But it is usually through another person that he meets our needs” (“Small Acts of Service,” *Ensign*, December 1974, p. 5). I believe it is one who hears and hearkens when the Lord speaks.

Consider now, even at this moment, the brother or sister sitting next to you, or the one nearby, through the hall, across the street, or down the road. Will you put yourself so in tune that you can try to see in that person what the Savior sees? Will you share with that brother or sister something that would ease a heavy load, brighten a dark day, expand a limited vision, or vitalize a dying hope, and try to do it the way you think the Savior might do it? Could you? Would you?

Given the opportunities available to each one of us this very week to live the sacramental life, can you feel within a growing strength, a yearning desire, an increased commitment to reach out? Will you consider seriously what truth of which you have a personal witness that you could teach another? And teach it in partnership with the Savior, even to the person sitting next to you who might be a stranger even though a brother or sister?

I tell you, if you will sincerely try to do this, something sweet and gentle will surround you.

Voices will be softened, hearts touched, and a deep feeling of caring will swell up within. You will feel the Spirit even as you serve in his name. It will be a spiritual experience, the kind we yearn for and can have when we remember him and have his Spirit with us.

It is in reaching out to others that we qualify ourselves and become more worthy of his name. Our ordinary work, our routine duties, and our familiar relationships can become more sacramental in nature.

One day I experienced that great joy while casually sitting by a friend who had recently been called as mission president, and I thought, “What could I share with him that would help at this important time in his life?” I endeavored to see in this friend what I thought the Lord might see in him. I desired to say what would be of importance to him at this time. I had a wonderful feeling of love for my longtime friend come into my heart, and I was prompted to share with him the thoughts that had come into my mind.

“I guess at a time like this,” I said, “one feels an increased urgency to have a pure vessel through which the Spirit can work unrestrained. Yet, isn’t it a marvelous thing to know that you will have access to that great power, that inspiration, and even revelation every day while yet you and your missionaries are striving for perfection?”

Almost immediately his eyes were moist. His chin began to quiver, and he said, “You must have known I needed to hear that.”

When we are in the church, on the bus, in the grocery store, in the classroom, and, most importantly, in our homes, let us strive to see each other the way we think we might, and, sensing that person’s divine potential, let us take the opportunity to teach an eternal truth that will be personalized because the Spirit prompts us. In the closing moments of the Savior’s life, while he suffered for us, he told us how we can be disciples for him:

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one for another. [John 13:34–35]

Every act of our lives can become a sacramental experience when we take upon us his name; and when our performance falls short in spite of our striving for perfection, we will find ourselves eagerly and anxiously and more gratefully than ever before, drawn to the Sabbath day and the sacramental altar where we can feel the glorious transformation of the healing of our wounded spirits as we commit to strive again and again to follow him.

With a new day and a new week and a new opportunity, we will welcome another chance to feel more deeply, to care more sincerely, to understand more compassionately, to teach more purposefully, to remember him always, and to have his Spirit to be with us.

As I held Shelly’s little hand in mine for one last squeeze before tiptoeing from her room that evening some years ago, a feeling of gratitude and reverence came flooding forth as I realized that—while her hand had been in mine for most of the afternoon as I helped her through the creek, across the rocks, and along the fallen tree trunk, and lifted her up to see the miracle of life unfolding in a robin’s nest—this child had led me to begin a search that would lift me up to a better understanding of a great eternal truth. King Benjamin explained it for us:

And now, because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters. [Mosiah 5:7]

Brothers and sisters, we can all be members of the same family. If you’re doing something you shouldn’t, consider Shelly’s question to me, “Why don’t you stop?” It may not always be easy, but with his help we can overcome.

I bear my witness to the reality of our eternal brotherhood and sisterhood, and extend my love unto each of you, my brothers and sisters, in the name of Jesus Christ, whose name we are privileged to bear. Amen.