

Will Heaven Feel Like Home When We Get There?

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Thank you, President Samuelson. Thank you, choir, for that beautiful interpretation of “My Little Welsh Home.” Thank you, Professor Hall. Professor Rosalind Hall is one of my oldest friends. She is a great British export and an almost impossible act to follow.

As you’ve gathered, I am not from around these parts. I was born in the United Kingdom, specifically in South Wales. That makes me a Welshman. The words *Welsh* and *Wales* are exonyms of Anglo-Saxon origin. An exonym is a name given to one nation by another. In other words, it’s not what a nation or people call themselves. These particular exonyms—*Welsh* and *Wales*—mean, respectively, “stranger or foreigner” and “land of the stranger or foreigner.” For many years after the Germanic invasions of Britain, the Welsh continued to refer to themselves as Brythoniaid or Britons. Nevertheless, they also eventually adopted the Anglo-Saxon words *Welsh* and *Wales*. I can only assume they did this quite naturally as they acquired the English language and in ignorance of the original meanings of these labels. No one in his right mind and inhabiting his own land would knowingly use a word that meant foreigner as a gentilic to refer to himself.

But despite this lapse, for well over 1,000 years now, the Welsh have referred to them-

selves and to their land, in their own language, as *Cymro* and *Cymru*. *Cymro* translates as “fellow countryman,” and *Cymru* as “land of my fellow countrymen” or “land of my people.” In this regard, it is probably worth noting that our national anthem is entitled “Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau,” which is usually rendered into English as “Land of My Fathers,” but which translates more accurately as “Ancient Land of My Fathers.” All of this confirms to me that the Welsh feel inseparably connected to their country, to their people, and to their forefathers. In other words, the concept of home, in both its narrow and broad senses, holds a central place in the Welsh psyche. For this reason I want to share with you this morning two personal stories to do with home.

Story One

My family and I arrived in the United States on 24 July 2000. It was Pioneer Day. Since then, my wife has claimed that we too are pioneers. And just as the original pioneers had to adapt to their new surroundings, we too were faced

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with a period of adjustment, which, I confess, is not over yet. Was it Oscar Wilde or George Bernard Shaw who said that Britain and the United States are two nations divided by a common language? The most authoritative sources appear to claim it was Shaw. Either way, I have discovered that the observation contains more than a grain of truth. Here are some of the cultural and linguistic differences that separate our two countries:

Cars

- We Brits store our suitcases in the boot, not the trunk.
- Our engine rests under a bonnet, not under a hood. Both words—*bonnet* and *hood*—refer to items of head wear. For the British the car is feminine (we often refer to it as “she”), so *bonnet* fits rather well. The word *hood* seems to me to be indeterminate, and I’m therefore not quite sure what, if anything, it responds to.
- Our cars do not have fenders but bumpers.
- Our exhaust pipes are fitted not with mufflers but with silencers.
- We are protected from the elements by a windscreen, not a windshield.
- If we want to turn, we signal or indicate: left indicator or blinker to turn left or right indicator or blinker to turn right. Indicators are always orange, never red. Red is reserved for brake lights and rear night-lights, which do not blink.
- We put petrol, not gas, in our tanks, and we fill up at a petrol or service station.
- We drive on the road, never on the pavement. Our pavement is your sidewalk. This confusing difference inevitably caused problems for me here in Provo when I took my driving test. It was hard for me to bring myself to drive my car on something called a pavement.
- Our best roads are motorways, not freeways.
- If we are in a hurry, we often overtake the car in front, and, if we are feeling especially

daring and inclined to flout the law, we may undertake. The connection between *undertake* and *undertaker* should give you some idea of what the British think about passing another car on the inside.

- If you park illegally in Britain, you will not be booted, but you may well be clamped.

Similar differences exist in many other lexical domains. For instance:

Food

We say jam, not jelly; jelly, not Jell-O; main course, not entrée; crisps, not chips; and chips, not french fries.

Shopping

Generally speaking, the word *store* is used only in the combination *department store*. If we need a generic word, we tend to use the word *shop*. We take our prescriptions to the chemist’s, not to the pharmacy or drugstore. I’ll leave it to you to guess what runs through my mind when I hear the word *drugstore*.

Weights and Measures

If you say to me that someone weighs 147 pounds, it doesn’t register. I have to convert the pounds into stones and pounds in order for them to mean something. Having done so, I know exactly what 10 stones 7 pounds represent. In Britain a billion is a million millions. Similarly, our imperial gallon is larger than your gallon. I mention this just to let you know that not everything is bigger in America.

Verb Morphology

What applies to vocabulary applies equally to verb morphology. For example, in Britain we say:

- I dived into the pool, not I dove.
- I sneaked into the house, not I snuck.
- I pleaded my case, not I plead my case.
- I’ve got better, not I’ve gotten better.

Pronunciation

If you are still awake, you will have noticed that pronunciation is also often very different. I don't suppose I will ever feel comfortable pronouncing *tomato*, *laboratory*, *Isaiah*, or *herb* in the American way. I'm not even sure I would know how.

Other Aspects of Language

Well, you will be relieved to hear that I'll provide no examples of bad language. Let me just say that what is a swear word or taboo word here may be perfectly acceptable in Britain, and vice versa. Such differences obviously provide plenty of scope for embarrassment.

The same type of mismatch between form and content may also be found in more neutral language. I have already referred to how the meanings of *pavement* and *jelly* differ in our two countries. These are by no means isolated cases. For example, when I table a proposal, I put it on the table for discussion. This, I gather, is precisely the opposite of what "tabling a proposal" means in American English.

Protocol/Laws

- To my amazement I discovered that there is a curfew for the under-eighteens here in Provo. My family's personal experience confirms that this curfew is indeed enforced.
- You are allowed to turn right on a red light! I strongly advise against trying the equivalent if you ever drive in the UK.
- We stop *at* the traffic light, not 20 or 30 yards before we reach it. This is a difference that continues to plague me as I drive in Provo. By the way, the colours displayed by our traffic lights are red, amber, and green.
- We drive on the left, have our steering wheel on the right, and look right before crossing the road. It's a completely different mind-set, and I would therefore not blame any of you for not wanting to get into a car with me.

You are probably asking yourselves by now where all this is leading. Well, there is a point I want to make. Because we see so many American programmes on British television, it is tempting for us to think that we know America. This was my mistake. I wasn't prepared for the culture shock when I moved here. It has been more than ten years, and I am still not finding it easy to make the changes that need to be made. By analogy, we attend church regularly. We talk frequently about heaven, about our Father and Elder Brother. Many of us, perhaps, think we know what heaven is like. But can we be sure that heaven will be a familiar place when we get there? Or will we experience the kind of culture shock I experienced when I came to the United States?

When I joined the Church, I was offered a new identity. In addition to being a subject of the United Kingdom, I was given the chance to become a subject of Christ the King. As we learn in 4 Nephi 1:17, in Christ's kingdom there are no "-ites": no Americanites, no Britishites, no Germanites—just simple followers of Christ. Moreover, His kingdom has its own laws, customs, institutions, and even language, and if we are going to be happy and feel accepted there, we need to adapt. In fact, we need to be considerably more amenable to change than I have been since arriving in the States. Otherwise, we will be like square pegs in round holes. To our mother tongue we need to add our Father's tongue. We also need to shed a few things, perhaps many things. As the Apostle Paul taught, the old man dies in the waters of baptism, and a new man is brought forth (see Romans 6:4; Ephesians 4:24). In other words, we must become a new person, we must be reborn in some profound way that involves not just taking upon us a new name (that of Christ) but also doing our best to think and act like Him. I cannot export my current ways of thinking and behaving to the celestial kingdom any more than I, as a Brit, can successfully import British ways of thinking and

behaving to the United States. Some things just do not travel well.

Unfortunately, adaptation and change are not easy. And they are not easy, in the context to which I refer, because our national and individual identities are inextricably intertwined. They also are not easy for another reason: they require a degree of surrender or relegation. Some people who emigrate may be delighted to surrender or relegate their former identity because they feel they are getting a better one; others may view this as an act of disloyalty or treachery. At the very least, they may feel they are being false to their background. I fall into this latter category. As I've said, I do not foresee the day when I will feel comfortable pronouncing *tomato*, *Isaiah*, and *herb* in the American way. However, when it comes to the gospel, things are rather different.

First, there is the good news that we are all trading up. The identities, both individual and national, that we seek to acquire as subjects of Christ are far better than the ones we surrender, however wonderful we may think these to be. Remember what Paul wrote in this regard: "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19).

Given that the original meaning of the word *Welsh* is "stranger/foreigner," it should not surprise you to learn that the phrase "strangers and foreigners" in this scripture has particular significance for me. It is as if Paul were saying, "Now therefore ye are no more Welsh." That's a sobering thought. In any event, the apostle's choice of language is very deliberate. We all know what an immense privilege it was in his day to enjoy Roman citizenship. Paul himself benefited from his status as a Roman on several occasions. And how proud Romans were to be Roman! Consequently, I have no doubt that the opposition established between "strangers and foreigners" and "fellowcitizens" would have struck Paul's contemporaries with peculiar

force. They would all have recognized that, in Paul's mind, being part of God's kingdom affords incomparable freedoms and protections, as well as a true sense of belonging. Even Roman citizens were strangers and foreigners when it came to the kingdom of God, and they too traded up when they accepted the Savior as their king. They became what the Welsh would call, in their own language, *Cymry*, or "fellow countrymen"—fellow countrymen, that is, with the Saints.

Second, we can feel confident that when we begin to assume our new identities, we are in no sense engaged in an act of betrayal. In fact, we merely embark upon a process of recovery. We begin to recover a sense of who we were when we stood in the presence of our Father, shouted for joy at the prospect of coming to Earth, and surely promised to do all we could to remain loyal and faithful to our background and heritage.

When we meet the Saviour again, we won't want to experience the culture shock that I had when I moved to America. Elder Maxwell once referred to the chasm that exists between Christ and us. He did not exaggerate. Nevertheless, as far as is possible, we want to come to think, speak, and behave like the Saviour. We want to feel that we belong in His society, where individual and national identities are also inextricably intertwined. So here are a few things that can help us narrow the gap between our Elder Brother and ourselves:

1. The Doctrine & Covenants teaches that "out of small things proceedeth that which is great" (D&C 64:33). We know what those small things are. We just need to make them part of our lives so that when the time comes to pass through the veil, we will be similar to heavenly beings.

2. In connection with this, Moroni gives very specific counsel. He writes:

Charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him.

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him. [Moroni 7:47–48; emphasis added]

3. True patriots are willing to give everything for their country, even their lives. Although we will not likely be called upon to sacrifice everything for the gospel, we must at least be willing to do so. The merchant in Matthew, chapter 13, sold everything he had in order to purchase a pearl of great price (see Matthew 13:45–46); the sons of Mosiah refused the kingdom of their father in order to have complete freedom to preach the gospel (see Mosiah 29:3); and King Lamoni’s father promised to give away all his sins to know God, to be raised from the dead, and to be saved at the last day (see Alma 22:18). Lamoni’s father requested a great deal in exchange for his sins, but certainly no more than is on offer to us all.

4. Acquisition of a celestial identity will require a conscious and determined effort on our part—an effort that must continue until we develop a new set of reflexes, a new mindset. It may seem difficult, but it really is just a matter of choice. Nephi probably said it best:

Therefore, cheer up your hearts, and remember that ye are free to act for yourselves—to choose the way of everlasting death or the way of eternal life. [2 Nephi 10:23; emphasis added]

5. Finally, in 3 Nephi 19:28 we read these words of the Saviour:

Father, I thank thee that thou hast purified those whom I have chosen, because of their faith, and

I pray for them, and also for them who shall believe on their words. [Emphasis added]

If we do all we can to be obedient, if we truly accept the Atonement—which, after all, is the most magnificent offer of reconciliation ever made—the day will come when the Saviour will petition the Father on our behalf. And I am confident that there is absolutely nothing that the Father will refuse His Only Begotten.

Story Two

I grew up in a Welsh village where everybody knew everybody. When I was approaching fifteen, I joined the Church. The nearest chapel was located in Merthyr Tydfil, about twelve miles from my home. When I reached the age of eighteen, I prepared to leave Wales in order to study in London. I remember vividly my last Sunday in Wales. At the end of our meetings that day, a Welsh tenor named Dave Harman suddenly stood up and began to sing to me. I accept that anywhere else such an occurrence would probably seem very odd indeed. In those days it wasn’t quite so odd in Wales. In fact, the tenor was soon joined by the rest of the congregation. The song they sang was “We’ll Keep a Welcome in the Hillside.”

Before I read the words of this song, there is something I need to explain. Although the lyrics are in English, they include one very significant Welsh word: *hiraeth*. The word is significant because it has no exact equivalent in English. This is why it appears in an otherwise English text. It means something like “longing/yearning for home” and refers to feelings much deeper and more poignant than those conveyed by the English word *homesickness*. Anyway, these are the words of the song:

*Far away a voice is calling,
Bells of memory chime
Come home again, come home again,
They call through the oceans of time.*

*We'll keep a welcome in the hillside.
We'll keep a welcome in the Vales.
This land you knew will still be singing
When you come home again to Wales.*

*This land of song will keep a welcome
And with a love that never fails.
We'll kiss away each hour of hiraeth
When you come home again to Wales.*

The recollection of this event is etched in my memory, not because of what I saw or heard but because of what it made me feel. Hiraeth is the stirring or voice that calls all Welshmen who venture abroad back home to Wales. Nowhere have I experienced this feeling more acutely than when, as a student, I frequently found myself in one of the great railway stations of London during the rush hour. Literally thousands of people would pass hurriedly by, seemingly with a sense of purpose, and I didn't know one of them. The setting was a far cry from the Welsh village of Glynneath, where everybody knew everybody and life proceeded at a much gentler pace. In my busier moments I don't often think of Wales. But in the still of the night, memories come flooding back, and with them hiraeth, that yearning to find yourself once again in your own land and among your own people, to be with those who think and behave just like you, to feel completely at ease in their company because of your shared heritage.

I like to think that as each of us prepared to leave our premortal estate for our adventure on earth, a tenor came forward and, quickly joined by a heavenly choir, began to sing words similar to these:

*Far away a voice is calling,
Bells of memory chime
Come home again, come home again,
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*We'll keep a welcome in the hillside.
We'll keep a welcome in the Vales.
This land you knew will still be singing
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*This land of song will keep a welcome
And with a love that never fails.
We'll kiss away each hour of hiraeth
When you come home again to Wales.*

I hope that, in our quieter moments, we sense or hear a voice from beyond the veil that calls us home. I hope we occasionally experience hiraeth, that yearning to return to our heavenly home, that place where there are no "strangers or foreigners" and where there is indeed a "love that never fails." The voice we need to listen for is, of course, the voice of the Spirit. As we listen, memories will come flooding back, and we will want to turn homeward. Each time we heed the Spirit's voice, we move one step closer to home. Remember that it is what we feel more than what we see or hear that remains etched in our memories. This is why it is vital to have the Spirit in our lives. I mentioned a moment ago that English has no exact equivalent of hiraeth. Nevertheless, the Saints really ought to have one, for we believe that we have a home like no other, and we ought to yearn to return to it someday. Think of that as the choir sings "We'll Keep a Welcome in the Hillside" following my remarks.

To conclude, it is my hope that we will listen for the voice that tells us that we have a home elsewhere and that we will allow that voice to guide our steps back to Him who gave us life. If we do this we will not feel awkward or out of place when we get there. Heaven will not seem like a foreign land. Rather, we will recognize its language as our own and its protocols as those we have embraced throughout our lives. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.