

HOPE THROUGH THE ATONEMENT

My husband and I have celebrated 52 Easter Sundays together since our marriage in the summer of 1963. Indeed, the Spirit of Easter and a hope in Christ have permeated our days together. Although we have never been blessed with an abundance of material goods, it was in the spirit of faith that we resolved to bring as many of his spirits into our home as our health and means would allow and that we would teach them the doctrine of Christ. Today the two of us have become a small multitude--10 children, 50 grandchildren and 3 great grandchildren, with more posterity on the way. Any success we have seen we credit to God's goodness and to the efficacy of the gospel of Christ.

It was in the spirit of faith that we embarked on a career of teaching gospel truths to the youth of the Church when we accepted an assignment at the San Diego Institute of Religion--Glen taught and I supported. That career, which commenced on the West Coast, ended 36 years later on the East Coast and provided thousands of choice relationships and embraced wonderful teaching, writing, and counseling experiences. In all of this I have willingly stood at my husband's side, having jointly promised our service and energy to the work of the Savior.

It was in the spirit of faith that we, and I emphasize the word--we, accepted priesthood callings and responsibilities spanning over 40 years at home and abroad. Glen attended and conducted innumerable early-morning and late-night stake administrative meetings as a counselor in two stake presidencies and as president of the Logan Central Stake. I assisted him with faith and support as he and I did all that we could to make the lives of the Saints better and sweeter. The message of Easter and the promises of the restored gospel was our incentive to make the work of the Church our work.

We spent 3 Easter Sundays and 3 Christmases abroad with our beloved missionaries (over 500 of them altogether) as we responded to an invitation to preside over the Germany Hamburg Mission in 1976. Again there were meetings, interviews, and conferences with an overriding focus upon the work and redemptive ministry of Jesus. We counted it a privilege to represent Him.

Among my sacred memories are those I have spent transcribing and assisting in the editing of patriarchal blessings pronounced upon young men and women by my husband. In a day fraught with distress and uncertainty, it has been a joy to hear promises of hope pronounced with power. These quiet, inspirational hours have been a gift to us as we have shared in the Lord's redemptive and ennobling work.

In recent years we have seen the Spirit of Easter flourish in the Holy Temple. We have ministered in behalf of many, many devoted Saints who come to serve their departed dead because they know there will be life and family beyond the grave. It has been my privilege to walk the halls of the Lord's house here in the Ogden temple and in the London temple and to perform sacred ordinances that reach into the lives of those that are beyond the veil. My husband has spent countless hours in sacred temple sealing rooms and has rejoiced in the privilege of exercising the blessed sealing power that pronounces glorious capstone promises upon the living and the dead.

In the spirit of gratitude, may I say that it is a privilege to stand at this pulpit on this Easter Sunday to bear witness of the Lord's goodness and the marvelous power of his infinite atonement.

It is one thing to study and ponder upon the blessings of the Great Atonement and to receive a testimony of the validity of the doctrines and powers involved. But it is quite another to see their application in the lives of others. When this occurs, the lives of the faithful become a living testimony in and of themselves.

During the last year we have seen a dramatic demonstration of a hope in Christ in the lives of our son, John and his wife, Sara. This began 11 months ago as we received a shocking, late night phone call from John and his wife. Sara had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer which had metastasized to the point that her liver functions were being severely compromised. She knew she could be staring death in the face and John was contemplating the possible loss of his beloved wife and the mother of their five children, ranging in ages from 11 years to 8 months. We did our best to provide comfort and reassurance over the phone, but a sleepless night left us with only one real recourse--we had to immediately leave for Madison, Wisconsin that we might be in their home and a part of their lives as they dealt with this enormous crisis.

Following that alarming phone call and throughout all the days to follow, our hearts, and the hearts of our entire family, were filled with prayer and continuous supplication in Sara's behalf. For Sara and John, faith and prayer quickly became the only real source of daily sustenance. Sara's descent into the valley of the shadow of death was no leisurely thing, and in a matter of days she left vivacious daily living and began to struggle with relentless pain, made almost unbearable by aggressive chemotherapy treatments. Her abdomen filled with fluid, causing great pressure and necessitating a draining procedure which would provide only a brief respite until the problem returned and additional fluid removal became necessary. Again and again this cycle repeated itself. Eventually Sara was confined to a hospital bed, and the most difficult days of her life provided a supreme test for her as well as our son. Sara's relentless pain and horrible apprehension came to an abrupt end as she passed from this life on the 4th of July last year. It was her Independence Day from a disease-ravaged body.

But now came the pain of deep sorrow for John, and although Sara had spoken with heart-felt assurance of the resurrection's reality during her final days, now the test was John's as he parted with his sweetheart and began to walk the lonely road of a single father. Sara's passing had come on a Saturday morning, and, to our surprise, less than 24 hours later John stood at the pulpit in his ward's Fast and Testimony meeting to bear his testimony of the great atonement and the incomparable hope it affords. Though his heart and mind were consumed with the pain of his loss, he spoke with unshakable confidence in a future reunion with his beloved wife, for during those hours that had intervened since her passing he had been enlivened and comforted by the goodness of Jesus who died that the dead might live again. Both Sara and John had exercised great faith that Sara's life might be preserved, but as God's design involved a different scenario, that faith had come to center upon the promise of a bright and glorious future day beyond the reach of pain and death.

President Gordon B. Hinckley spoke of this bright hope:

"Whenever the cold hand of death strikes, there shines through the gloom and the darkness of that hour the triumphant figure of the Lord Jesus Christ. He, the Son of God, who by his matchless and eternal power overcame death. He is the Redeemer of the world. He gave His

life for each of us. He took it up again and became the first fruits of them that slept. He, as King of Kings, stands triumphant above all rulers. He is our comfort, our only true comfort, when the dark shroud of earthly night closes about us as the spirit departs the human form."
(Gordon B. Hinckley, Ensign, May, 1996, p. 67)

Since Sara's passing so many months ago, that hope in Christ and promises associated with his Atonement have held our son on track, even establishing a higher course in life--that of taking his family back to their mother in the realms of Celestial glory.

But my description of the faith and hope that sustained Sara prior to her passing, which also comforted John in the days that followed, is only part of the whole story. There is another equally important dimension of hope that was so very important in Sara's life and in her anticipation of death's reality--early in their marriage she had come to know a peace which is described in the scriptures as the peace that passes understanding. Although Sara had always been a good person, her personal life had not been without blemish. Like all of us mortals, she had made some mistakes in earlier years that had caused her to wonder about her status in the sight of her Heavenly Father. And though there was a period in her young adult years wherein she distanced herself from the Church and the blessings of the restored gospel, nevertheless, those days had been replaced with the fire of personal testimony and a knowledge of that divine approval which comes to all who reach out for the power of healing and forgiveness promised through the Atonement of Christ. Death is truly bleak to those who have no hope in a glorious resurrection. But for those who have been renewed through the power of faith and repentance, death need not be feared. Indeed the Lord has said: "And it shall come to pass that those that die in me shall not taste of death, for it shall be sweet unto them." (D&C 42:46) Despite her physical pain, I believe that Sara's departure from her deathbed was sweet as the Savior's love and approbation enveloped her.

Glen and I have taught the great truths of the Atonement to our children and in many formal Church settings, but the moving experiences of the last year have added depth, scope, and power to those teachings for our entire family. We have seen the beautiful benefits of a hope in Christ in the lives of our children, and have experienced those blessings in an intimate way in our own lives.

I would like draw my remarks to a close by sharing the sentiments Elder Jeffrey R. Holland expressed in General Conference a year ago.

"Beginning in the spiritual anguish of the Garden of Gethsemane, moving to the Crucifixion on a cross at Calvary, and concluding on a beautiful Sunday morning inside a donated tomb, a sinless, pure, and holy man, the very Son of God Himself, did what no other deceased person had ever done nor ever could do. Under His own power, He rose from death, never to have His body separated from His spirit again.

That first Easter sequence of Atonement and Resurrection constitutes the most consequential moment, the most generous gift, the most excruciating pain, and the most majestic manifestation of pure love ever demonstrated in the history of this world. Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, suffered, died and rose from death in order that He could grasp us as we fall, hold us with His might, and through our obedience to His commandments, lift us to eternal life."

I love the hymns of the Church, especially the Sacramental hymns, and now let me read these words as an expression of my own personal testimony.

"I stand all amazed at the love Jesus offers me, Confused at the grace that so fully he proffers me. I tremble to know that for me he was crucified, That for me, a sinner, he suffered, he bled and died. Oh, it is wonderful that he should care for me enough to die for me! Oh, it is wonderful, wonderful to me!"