

May 14, 2017

Good morning brothers and sisters. For those of you who don't know me— My name is Ruth Ann Shannon. My husband Jake and I moved to this ward from New Jersey nearly 4 years ago. We have six kids, one son in law and one granddaughter. Our oldest daughter Jessica moved back in with us while her husband Cody is deployed with the Marine Corps. She is mom to our first grandchild Adeline, who was born just yesterday morning. Our son Keaton is working in Kentucky for the summer and will return to school at USU in the Fall. Alisha and Jamie are a Sophomore and Freshman at East Lake High School. Rachel and Spencer are in the 4th and 2nd grade at Mcauliffe Elementary School.

Being asked to speak on Mother's Day can be quite a challenge. Things I say could be misunderstood, or hurtful to some. Where this day is meant to be celebrated and enjoyed, many women hate Mother's Day for a multitude of reasons. Some women dearly want to be mothers, but they are not. Some mothers struggle with feelings of inadequacies for all the stuff they feel they aren't doing "right". They might feel as though they are just barely treading water and doing everything they can to keep their head above the surface. You won't find any Hallmark Mother's Day cards that say "You don't have to be perfect. You're doing your best ... and that's ok!" — But I think there should be! Jeffrey R Holland once said "If you try your best to be the best parent you can be, you will have done all that a human being can do and all that God expects you to do."

I hope my words today will be comforting and encouraging- especially to those who may struggle on this day — and that the Spirit will touch all of our hearts.

I would like to start off with some words from Victor Hugo which read:

“She broke the bread into two fragments and gave them to her children, who ate with eagerness. ‘She hath kept none for herself,’ grumbled the sergeant.

“‘Because she is not hungry,’ said a soldier.

“‘No,’ said the sergeant, ‘because she is a mother.’”

Not to make light of his words- but as I first read them I thought jokingly “Now, I must not be a very good mother”... Because Lynelle Klein gave me some of her “to die for” oreo truffles for my birthday last week and I have guarded them with my life — as I would hide away in my bedroom to savor them all to myself. If any of you have ever had Lynelle’s truffles— you’ll understand why they are just too good share!

Victor Hugo’s words were taken a step further in a story my dad shared in his Christmas card a few years ago:

“A personal friend made an unusual discovery one morning as fall was just yielding its place to the onset of winter. It had been unseasonably cold the night before and there had been a skiff of snow. His thoughts centered on a mother hen and her newly hatched brood of little chicks. As he left his home and went out into the cold, he wondered how the little ones had fared in this sudden weather change. Soon he found the mother hen with her wings extended over the chicks. With no shelter close at hand, she had been their only protection from the bitter cold. As my friend knelt down in the new snow, he touched the hen’s wings and discovered that they were frozen solid. The chicks were safe,

however. — Following deeply implanted mothering instincts, the hen had sacrificed her life to preserve theirs.

My friend sensed that before his eyes was a living parable of love. His mind immediately went to the Savior who had made such a sacrifice on a monumental, almost incomprehensible, scale. Precious words came to his mind from D&C 43:24 ‘O ye nations of the earth, how often would I have gathered you together as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings.’” Jesus Christ seeks to gather and protect His people as a mother hen gathers her chicks beneath her wings. And as the hen in the story, our Savior showed His love for us as He paid the ultimate price of his life, to save us.

In Genesis, we read that we are created in God’s image and we are His children. Being sons and daughters of deity, we inherited divine attributes in their embryonic state. Charity, or the pure love of Christ is the supreme attribute each of us has within our soul. A mother’s love for her children is the finest example of charity.

Merrill J. Bateman, a former president of BYU once said:

“If a woman has any degree of spiritual maturity, there is an instinctive love for her newborn child. (...) She has passed near death to bring the newborn in to the world and would sacrifice her own life to protect it. In the early years the infant’s dependence bonds the mother and child to each other. There is a spiritual dimension to the bonding.

As a child develops and the dependence lessens, the love or intense, affectionate concern for a son or daughter does not diminish but takes on new dimensions. Often there is less concern for the physical but more concern for the emotional, spiritual, and intellectual challenges.

The intense, affectionate concerns of a parent for a child, especially a mother's deep feelings for her offspring, are a divine inheritance. They are part of the light brought from the premortal world. Since light responds to light, the divine spark of love in the heart of a child is lit by the candle flame burning brightly within the soul of a mother or father."

I think back to my earlier years with new babies, toddlers, diapers, night feedings, colic, teething, sheer exhaustion and a husband who travelled extensively for work as a very challenging time in my life. We had a lot of special times and happy memories... but wow, life was crazy!

I smile when I remember a particularly stressful day when the 4 kids I had at the time all wanted my attention. There was the constant "Mom..." coming from each of my kids all at the same time. About to lose my cool, I said "Alright, if I hear one more person say Mom, I'm going to lose it!" All was quiet until a minute later my then 3 year old daughter Jamie said "Wuufann..." We have a lot of fun repeating that story often in our family.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland once said:

"Do the best you can through these years, but whatever else you do, cherish that role that is so uniquely yours and for which heaven itself sends angels to watch over you and your little ones. Husbands — especially husbands — as well as Church leaders and friends in every direction, be helpful and sensitive and wise. Remember, 'To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven.'"

I am reminded of an experience during that crazy busy time in my life...

I was at a Relief Society Enrichment night activity where the lesson being taught was encouraging women to refrain from wasting their time watching too much TV and to spend it in other positive ways. I remember sitting with tears running down my face as I felt so inadequate surrounded by so many people I felt were so much more perfect than me. I had so very very little time to myself that I would be so grateful to be able to watch a show on TV any slim chance I got. At the conclusion of the lesson, before I was able to sneak away to head home without having to talk to anyone— the Relief Society President who must have noticed my tears during the lesson came up and asked me if I was ok. I reluctantly shared my feelings with her and her response was so sweet. She told me that I was in a different season in my life and that I was doing the absolute best I could and that this lesson applied differently to me. I was so grateful to her for her compassion and kind words of encouragement.

The pressure of motherhood isn't however just in diapers and carpooling, but in some sleepless nights spent in thought and prayer seeking earnestly for the capacity to raise these children to be what God wants them to be. If we strive to love God and live the gospel and plead for guidance and comfort of the Holy Ghost, and if we endeavor to worship with all our abilities, and show others the same caring, compassionate, forgiving heart we want Heavenly Father to show us and try to be the best parent we can be... we are doing our best.

Elder Holland said:

“Sometimes the decision of a child or grandchild will break our heart. Sometimes expectations won't immediately be met. Every

mother or father worries about that. Even that beloved and wonderfully successful parent President Joseph F. Smith plead, ‘Oh! God, let me not lose my own.’ That is every parent’s cry, and in it is something of every parent’s fear. But no one has failed who keeps trying and keeps praying.”

My father shared with me story that he had heard, that some years ago a well meaning High Counselor devoted much of his Stake Conference address to the feelings of pride he had in the accomplishments of his model family. He spoke in glowing terms of successful missionary service rendered by both sons and daughters. Then, spoke with equal satisfaction of the fact that all of his children had been endowed and sealed in the temple. Truly he painted a picture of his home and family as a bit of heaven on earth.

Later in the conference meeting the Visiting Authority hearkened back to the High Counselor’s remarks. “We are all happy for you and the success you and your wife have enjoyed in rearing an exceptional family,” he said. “But perhaps it would be better for you to be less publicly vocal about the blessings you have enjoyed. Indeed, there are many in this congregation today who have been equally diligent in the effort they have made in meeting their parental responsibilities, but have seen less success. It would be unfortunate for some of the faithful with us here today to measure their own challenges at home against the near perfect standard you have described and to feel themselves less worthy or inferior to you when they have done and continue to do their very best in meeting and solving challenges within their own homes.”

Elder Holland had some advice for parents who might find themselves with these challenges:

“When you have come to the Lord in meekness and lowliness of heart and, as one mother said ‘pounded on the doors of heaven to ask for, to plead for, to demand guidance and wisdom and help for this wondrous task,’ that door is thrown open to provide you the influence and the help of all eternity. Claim the promises of the Savior of the world. Ask for the healing balm of the Atonement for whatever may be troubling you or your children. Know that in faith things will be made right in spite of you, or more correctly, because of you.”

We can't do this alone, and we don't have to. We have our Father in Heaven to help us in this great responsibility of motherhood/parenthood. We will be magnified, made better than we are if we make an honest effort. We can rely on the Lord and He will bless us.

In closing I'd like to share a Parental Pledge Elder Boyd K. Packer made during the earlier years of his service regarding his role as a father and the love he had for his children.

“All of my children shall be saved and have a place in God's Kingdom — if not this year, then next year — and if not next year, then in ten years — and if not in ten years, then in fifty years, for I shall never give up.”

I am grateful for the privilege of being a mother. I love my children dearly and I hope they will never doubt that. I am far from perfect, but I am doing my best. I add my parental pledge to that of Elder Packers'— that I will never give up on my children.

An incredible example to me of a mother's selfless charitable love is my mother in law. She has lived through and is living through 4 of her 9 children plus 1 daughter in law's horrific substance abuse addictions. I am amazed at her patience and unfailing love

towards them. Two of her children have been able to travel the long, difficult road of recovery— made possible only through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Her children will never doubt of their mother's testimony of the Savior and of her love for her children.

I am also grateful for my own mother. Raising 10 children I'm sure wasn't easy. But we had a happy household. Our home was a place full of laughter as well as a place where the peaceful warmth of the Spirit could be felt. I love my mom deeply and I aim to be a mother like her.

I testify that God lives and loves us. He is truly our Father in Heaven and knows us better than we know ourselves. If we reach out to Him, he is always listening. Jesus Christ is our Savior and this is His church.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.