



Community of Christ

~THE RESTORING CHRIST~

*Sermon shared by Steve Veazey June 10, 2007
during a worship service celebrating the dedication
of the Kirtland Temple Visitor and Spiritual
Formation Center.*

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church materials, this PDF is not an official
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In 1832, Joseph Smith Jr. and Sidney Rigdon were praying for insight regarding the meaning of John 5:29. While thus engaged, they were granted a vision of the Eternal Christ. In response to that revelatory encounter, the prophet wrote what is now Doctrine and Covenants 76, a portion of which I will read now:



And, now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him, that he lives; for we saw him, even on the right hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father; that by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created; and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God.
—Doctrine and Covenants 76:3g–h

Today I come before you to bear testimony of Jesus Christ as proclaimed and experienced by the Restoration movement, our faith heritage. The Christ of whom I bear witness, lives eternally at the center of our faith. We know this Christ as the embodiment of God's nature and purposes—God's eternal and living Word active in creation. We know this Christ as the One in whom and through whom divine judgment, mercy, and grace interact to affect our reconciliation, redemption, and salvation. We know this Christ as the One in whom and through whom the passionate dream of God for

shalom—the fullness of peace—throughout the whole creation is clearly revealed.

As a faith community, we have been given ample gifts, scriptural resources, sacraments, spiritual insights, and symbols that orient our lives toward Christ so that we may deepen our faith relationship. Among these gifts are the temples in Kirtland and Independence. Both temples, through their breathtaking architecture, call us to reverence and awe in the face of beauty that awakens our souls to the need to worship God as the creator and sustainer of all that is. We simply cannot be self-absorbed and self-important when we are in the temples.

Awe, wonder, and humility are the prelude to genuine spiritual awakening. Our souls are created to relate to God. Drawn into worship through a sense of the Holy communicated by our surroundings, we soon find ourselves in a place where what seems to separate the physical from the spiritual, the seen from the unseen, and the temporal from the eternal is very permeable—a place where

we become more open and vulnerable to God's Spirit and grace. It is wonderful to be here to worship with each of you in such a place. This temple has a certain drawing power for both the faithful and the casual passerby.

As a young adult, one of my best friends and I announced that we were going to see the Kirtland Temple. As poor college students we pooled our money for gas and ate peanut butter sandwiches as we navigated from Tennessee to Kirtland, Ohio. After taking a tour and introducing ourselves to the guides, we were graciously invited to come back later to sit in the temple in the quietness and kaleidoscopic light of the dying day. As we sat in holy silence, we soaked in the soul of the Restoration movement. We learned what it meant to be still and know that God is God.

These sacred spaces also serve to keep us focused on the true meaning of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. I find it fascinating that the Kirtland Temple was most often referred to as the "House of the Lord" by those who built it. We use the phrase "House of the

Lord” frequently to refer to many of our church facilities. We often greet people by saying, “Welcome to the House of the Lord!”

However, the early Latter Day Saints were quite literal in their belief that the Lord’s return was imminent—a belief not unique to them at that time—and that when he returned he would need a worthy “house” in which to dwell. In Matthew 8:20, Jesus is quoted as saying: “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” But if the early Latter Day Saints had anything to do with it, that would no longer be the case in Kirtland!

Without getting tied up in the theological questions that arise from such a view, I am fascinated by the sense of intimate relationship with the person and work of Christ that permeated the church in those days.

To perceive that one’s faith community was called, literally, to build a house for Jesus Christ to dwell in reveals an unusual passion for the

mission of the person at the center of the gospel story. And to construct such a house despite incredible obstacles, chief of which was their poverty, is truly challenging and inspiring for us today. Oh that we might recover such devotion and unfettered generosity to support the mission of Christ in our time!

Such a call is before us. The purposes of the Temple in Independence also summon us to become more intimate with Jesus Christ through its emphasis on peace, reconciliation, healing of the spirit, and wholeness of body, mind, and spirit—ministries at the heart of Jesus' life and mission.

Doctrine and Covenants 156:5 asserts that the Temple "...shall be a place in which the essential meaning of the Restoration as healing and redeeming agent is given new life and understanding, inspired by the life and witness of the Redeemer of the world."

In a time when many seek to fashion Christ in their own images, to serve their own agendas, these temples constantly draw us back to

the true focus of the gospel: God's revelation in Jesus Christ and the call for all to "follow him" to discover healing, reconciliation and peace.

Both temples—in Kirtland and Independence—remind us that, above all else, Jesus Christ seeks to restore us to life as we were created to experience it; life as God intends it to be; life characterized by love, generosity, relationships of mutuality, sharing, and peacefulness.

And so we begin to see that these sacred places serve as symbols of who we are called to be, individually and corporately, as God's new community in Christ. This is expressed most clearly in Ephesians 2:17–22. Speaking of the ultimate aim of the ministry and sacrifice of Christ on the cross, the writer asserts:

He (Christ) came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and

members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

The temples, places of beauty, worship, education, and church guidance, are compasses and lighthouses for our faith journey. They serve as constant reminders that we are called to live counter to the cultures of isolation, individualism, greediness, and suspicion that surrounds us. They constantly point beyond themselves to steer us to our true calling to become God's spiritual house, built on the witness and sacrifice of Jesus Christ—a household that unites, heals, restores, and frees people through community to express their best selves no matter who they are...a household in which Jesus would truly feel at home!

This understanding is critical to our future as a faith community if our true desire is to be faithful to the call of God to us. These are not just

words meant to sound nice. God in Christ is calling us to become a worldwide community through which the vision, personality, and purposes of Christ continue to be fulfilled. This is a truth that was indelibly imprinted on me through the impress of the Spirit as I was engaged in a series of prayerful reflections and experiences that led up to what is now Doctrine and Covenants 163.

Speaking of the hope and need for spiritual awakening and renewal in the church that will re-ignite and fuel effective ministry and witness, the following counsel from Section 163:8c emphasizes our ultimate purpose and mission:

Vital to this awakening is the understanding that the Temple calls the entire church to become a sanctuary of Christ's peace, where people from all nations, ethnicities, and life circumstances can be gathered into a spiritual home without dividing walls, as a fulfillment of the vision for which Jesus Christ sacrificed his life.

It is this calling and vision that we must translate into the attitudes and behaviors of life together in Christ. On several occasions recently I have seen that vision becoming reality in different parts of the world. Cathi and I traveled along with others to Honduras just after World Conference to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the church there. Over the course of several days, a growing number of people gathered to share in the festivities. There was a noticeable spirit present of joy in community.

At one point, as we were gazing over the diverse crowd, one of the local ministers noted that such a gathering was quite remarkable. There were people from Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua: “Only a few years back,” he said, “we were strangers to each other. Our governments were at odds. We projected attitudes of hate and suspicion across our borders. We did violence to one another. But now it is different. We are being transformed into a community of peacefulness and we must take this witness to other places and nations.”

The dividing walls of hostility were being broken down through witness of the Christ. They were becoming a household of God, a spiritual temple or sanctuary of peace in Christ. And, as he spoke, it occurred to me that the backdrop for all of the activities that week was an artist's rendering of the Temple in Independence, dedicated to the pursuit of peace. The ministries of the Temple, which represent or exhibit the ministries of Jesus Christ, had become the ministries of the expanding church in Central America.

I recently received an e-mail from Diane Barnett a good friend in Fremont, California. She has taken the concept of the Children's Peace Pavilion, housed at the Temple Complex in Independence, and established it in her own congregational facility: a peace pavilion for children to visit—particularly schoolchildren—to learn about peace in their lives and relationships. Here is an excerpt from her e-mail:

The Peace Pavilion has been overwhelmingly well received. All of the teachers that have come through, 18 to date, have been extremely impressed. Not only with the activities, but with the concept. Some

have said every elementary school child in the Tri-City area should come through. That, of course, is the goal. Some of the children have said they want to live there and never leave. In a couple of weeks we will have a 3' x 12' sign on the side of the building and I expect we will then begin to get lots of phone calls. Many of the parents who have come with their child's class have asked why they didn't know it was there. The members of the mission center have been willing to come many miles and some have come to spend the night in order to be able to volunteer at the Peace Pavilion when there is a field trip visit.

The congregation in Fremont is demonstrating what it means to be a people of the Temple, a sanctuary of Christ's peace, a community that unites, heals, and restores—a place where children want to live because they have tasted of life as God's intends it!

Recently, Dave, Becky, and I met with Apostle Susan Skoor, who oversees the Pacific Field, including the West Coast of the United States. She shared with us how some of our church members in

California are living in fear because, as Spanish-speaking immigrants from Mexico and Central America, they are being targeted for oppressive treatment.

She told us the story of how one member of the church, who is here legally, was taken from his home and interrogated for hours because of his name, appearance, and where he lived. Despite his documentation, he was told that he was not believable.

This is just one story of a growing number about our own church members in the United States who are being mistreated because of their ethnicity. Our Hispanic ministers are pleading for help.

Local members of the church are organizing to provide pastoral support, including child care for children whose parents are being detained or sent away from their homes. They are also networking with other organizations to provide legal aid for immigrants who are being treated harshly because of the rising tide of fear and anger toward “foreigners” in this nation.

They are creating a network of ministries and partnerships that are providing a sanctuary of peace for people who are desperately trying to create a future of hope and opportunity for their children.

If our faith is genuine, it cannot be limited to idealistic rhetoric, but must be translated into attitudes and actions that are congruent with whom we say we are.

It is interesting that both of the temples of the church were constructed in places where our faith ancestors were seen as aliens, immigrants, and strangers and, who, as a result, were marginalized, threatened, and persecuted. The walls of this temple [Kirtland] are marked by the tears of those who feared for their lives as they were building it because they were seen as outsiders. And yet here we are, generations later, proclaiming peace in Christ and working for communities of peace, as our best understanding of the essence of the gospel.

In the years ahead we intend for the Kirtland Temple and the Temple in Independence to play vital roles in guiding the ongoing development of our identity, message, and mission as a prophetic faith movement throughout the world.

The Kirtland Temple, in addition to being a nationally registered historic landmark, will play an important role in shaping generations of disciples in the Community of Christ. This will occur through the telling of our sacred story which informs the shape and content of our faith and character. It will also occur through the provision of spiritual formation programs and retreats for individuals and groups that will enrich the sharing of the gospel throughout the world.

These ministries, as I indicated yesterday, will be directly linked to the unfolding ministries of the Independence Temple. Currently we have a Temple Ministries team that is exploring how the purposes of the Temple related to spiritual healing, reconciliation, and peace can be brought to fuller expression for the blessing of the whole church.

We look forward to the continued emergence of truly transformative ministries for people who live in the real world—a world too often filled with pain, struggle, and conflict. We intend to present to the world a Christ who restores and heals through the grace of God.

These are exciting and hope-filled times for the church. We are reconnecting to the initial spiritual impulses and vision of the Restoration movement even as we bring them to new expression for this time and for centuries to come.

Let us go forward into the future as a people who are confident in our calling and mission to generously share the peace of Jesus Christ with the world.