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Hearts Knit in Righteousness and Unity

At this 200-year hinge point in our Church history, let us commit ourselves to live righteously and be united as never before.

Righteousness and unity are profoundly significant.¹ When people love God with all their hearts and righteously strive to become like Him, there is less strife and contention in society. There is more unity. I love a true account that exemplifies this.

As a young man not of our faith, General Thomas L. Kane assisted and defended the Saints as they were required to flee Nauvoo. He

was an advocate for the Church for many years.²

In 1872, General Kane, his talented wife, Elizabeth Wood Kane, and their two sons traveled from their home in Pennsylvania to Salt Lake City. They accompanied Brigham Young and his associates on a trek south to St. George, Utah. Elizabeth approached her first visit to Utah with reservations about the women. She was surprised

by some of the things she learned. For instance, she found that any career by which a woman could earn a living was open to them in Utah.³ She also found Church members were kind and understanding with respect to Native Americans.⁴

During the trip they stayed in Fillmore at the home of Thomas R. and Matilda Robison King.⁵

Elizabeth wrote that as Matilda was preparing a meal for President Young and his company, five American Indians came into the room. Although uninvited, it was clear they expected to join the company. Sister King spoke to them “in their dialect.” They sat down with their blankets with a pleasant look on their faces. Elizabeth asked one of the King children, “What did your mother say to those men?”

Matilda’s son’s reply was, “She said ‘These strangers came first, and I have only cooked enough for them; but your meal is on the fire cooking now, and I will call you as soon as it is ready.’”

Elizabeth asked, “Will she really do that, or just give them scraps at the kitchen-door?”⁶

Matilda’s son answered, “Mother will serve them just as she does you, and give them a place at her table.”

And so she did, and “they ate with perfect propriety.” Elizabeth explained that this hostess rose 100 percent in her opinion.⁷ Unity is enhanced when people are treated with dignity and respect, even though they are different in outward characteristics.

As leaders, we are not under the illusion that in the past all relationships were perfect, all conduct was Christlike, or all decisions were just. However, our faith teaches that we are all children of our Father in Heaven, and we worship Him and His Son,



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Jesus Christ, who is our Savior. Our desire is that our hearts and minds will be knit in righteousness and unity and that we will be one with Them.⁸

Righteousness is a broad, comprehensive term but most certainly includes living God's commandments.⁹ It qualifies us for the sacred ordinances that constitute the covenant path and blesses us to have the Spirit give direction to our lives.¹⁰

Being righteous is not dependent on each of us having every blessing in our lives at this time. We may not be married or blessed with children or have other desired blessings now. But the Lord has promised that the righteous who are faithful “may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness.”¹¹

Unity is also a broad, comprehensive term but most certainly exemplifies the first and second great commandments to love God and love our fellowmen.¹² It denotes a Zion people whose hearts and minds are “knit together in unity.”¹³

The context for my message is the contrast and lessons from sacred scriptures.

It has been 200 years since the Father and His Son first appeared and commenced the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ in 1820. The account in 4 Nephi in the Book

of Mormon includes a similar 200-year period after the Savior appeared and established His Church in ancient America.

The historical record we read in 4 Nephi describes a people where there were no envyings, strifes, tumults, lyings, murders, or any manner of lasciviousness. Because of this righteousness, the record states, “surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God.”¹⁴

With respect to unity, 4 Nephi reads, “There was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people.”¹⁵

Unfortunately, 4 Nephi then describes a dramatic change that began in the “two hundred and first year,”¹⁶ when iniquity and division destroyed righteousness and unity. The depths of depravity that then occurred were subsequently so evil that ultimately the great prophet Mormon laments to his son Moroni:

“But O my son, how can a people like this, whose delight is in so much abomination—

“How can we expect that God will stay his hand in judgment against us?”¹⁷

In this dispensation, although we live in a special time, the world has

not been blessed with the righteousness and unity described in 4 Nephi. Indeed, we live in a moment of particularly strong divisions. However, the millions who have accepted the gospel of Jesus Christ have committed themselves to achieving both righteousness and unity. We are all aware that we can do better, and that is our challenge in this day. We can be a force to lift and bless society as a whole. At this 200-year hinge point in our Church history, let us commit ourselves as members of the Lord's Church to live righteously and be united as never before. President Russell M. Nelson has asked us “to demonstrate greater civility, racial and ethnic harmony and mutual respect.”¹⁸ This means loving each other and God and accepting everyone as brothers and sisters and truly being a Zion people.

With our all-inclusive doctrine, we can be an oasis of unity and celebrate diversity. Unity and diversity are not opposites. We can achieve greater unity as we foster an atmosphere of inclusion and respect for diversity. During the period I served in the San Francisco California Stake presidency, we had Spanish-, Tongan-, Samoan-, Tagalog-, and





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Mandarin-language-speaking congregations. Our English-speaking wards were composed of people from many racial and cultural backgrounds. There was love, righteousness, and unity.

Wards and branches in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are determined by geography or language,¹⁹ not by race or culture. Race is not identified on membership records.

Early in the Book of Mormon, approximately 550 years before the birth of Christ, we are taught the fundamental commandment regarding the relationship between Father in Heaven's children. All are to keep the Lord's commandments, and all are invited to partake of the Lord's goodness; "and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile."²⁰

The Savior's ministry and message have consistently declared all races and colors are children of God. We are all brothers and sisters. In our doctrine we believe that in the host country for the Restoration, the United States, the U.S. Constitution²¹ and related documents,²² written by imperfect men, were inspired by God to bless all people. As we read

in the Doctrine and Covenants, these documents were "established, and should be maintained for the rights and protection of *all flesh*, according to just and holy principles."²³ Two of these principles were agency and accountability for one's own sins. The Lord declared:

"Therefore, it is not right that any man should be in bondage one to another.

"And for this purpose have I established the Constitution of this land, by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose, and redeemed the land by the shedding of blood."²⁴

This revelation was received in 1833 when the Saints in Missouri were suffering great persecution. The heading to Doctrine and Covenants section 101 reads in part: "Mobs had driven them from their homes in Jackson County. . . . Threats of death against [members] of the Church were many."²⁵

This was a time of tension on several fronts. Many Missourians considered Native Americans a relentless enemy and wanted them removed from the land. In addition, many of the Missouri settlers were slave owners and felt threatened by those who were opposed to slavery.

In contrast, our doctrine respected the Native Americans, and our desire was to teach them the gospel of Jesus Christ. With respect to slavery, our scriptures had made it clear that no man should be in bondage to another.²⁶

Ultimately, the Saints were violently driven out of Missouri²⁷ and then forced to move to the West.²⁸ The Saints prospered and found the peace that accompanies righteousness, unity, and living the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I rejoice in the Savior's Intercessory Prayer recorded in the Gospel of John. The Savior acknowledged that the Father had sent Him and that He, the Savior, had finished the work He was sent to do. He prayed for His disciples and for those who would believe in Christ: "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us."²⁹ Oneness is what Christ prayed for prior to His betrayal and Crucifixion.

In the first year after the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ, recorded in section 38 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord speaks of wars and wickedness and declares, "I say unto you, be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine."³⁰

Our Church culture comes from the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Romans is profound.³¹ The early Church in Rome was composed of Jews and Gentiles. These early Jews had a Judaic culture and had "won their emancipation, and began to multiply and flourish."³²

The Gentiles in Rome had a culture with a significant Hellenistic influence, which the Apostle Paul understood well because of his experiences at Athens and Corinth.

Paul sets forth the gospel of Jesus Christ in a comprehensive fashion.

He chronicles pertinent aspects of both Judaic and Gentile culture³³ that conflict with the true gospel of Jesus Christ. He essentially asks each of them to leave behind cultural impediments from their beliefs and culture that are not consistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul admonishes the Jews and the Gentiles to keep the commandments and love one another and affirms that righteousness leads to salvation.³⁴

The culture of the gospel of Jesus Christ is not a Gentile culture or a Judaic culture. It is not determined by the color of one's skin or where one lives. While we rejoice in distinctive cultures, we should leave behind aspects of those cultures that conflict with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Our members and new converts often come from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds. If we are to follow President Nelson's admonition to gather scattered Israel, we will find we are as different as the Jews and Gentiles were in Paul's time. Yet we can be united in our love of and faith in Jesus Christ. Paul's Epistle to the Romans establishes the principle that we follow the culture and doctrine of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the model for us even today.³⁵ The ordinances of the temple unite us in special ways and allow us to be one in every eternally significant way.

We honor our pioneer members across the world not because they were perfect but because they overcame hardships, made sacrifices, aspired to be Christlike, and were striving to build faith and be one with the Savior. Their oneness with the Savior made them one with each other. This principle is true for you and me today.

The clarion call to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is to strive to be a Zion people who are of one heart and one mind and dwell in righteousness.³⁶

It is my prayer that we will be righteous and united and completely focused on serving and worshipping our Savior, Jesus Christ, of whom I testify. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. See Doctrine and Covenants 38:27.
2. Thomas Kane's service in behalf of the members has consistently been portrayed "as an act of selfless sacrifice by a young idealist who witnessed the injustices inflicted upon a persecuted religious minority by a cruel and hostile majority" (introduction to Elizabeth Wood Kane, *Twelve Mormon Homes Visited in Succession on a Journey through Utah to Arizona*, ed. Everett L. Cooley [1974], viii).
3. See Kane, *Twelve Mormon Homes*, 5.
4. See Kane, *Twelve Mormon Homes*, 40.
5. See Lowell C. (Ben) Bennion and Thomas R. Carter, "Touring Polygamous Utah with Elizabeth W. Kane, Winter 1872–1873," *BYU Studies*, vol. 48, no. 4 (2009), 162.
6. Apparently, Elizabeth assumed most Americans at that time would have given



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the American Indians just scraps and treated them differently from their other guests.

7. See Kane, *Twelve Mormon Homes*, 64–65. It is noteworthy that many Native Americans, including several chiefs, became members of the Church. See also John Alton Peterson, *Utah's Black Hawk War* (1998) 61; Scott R. Christensen, *Sagwitch: Shoshone Chieftain, Mormon Elder, 1822–1887* (1999), 190–95.
8. In this dispensation "the righteous shall be gathered out from among all nations, and shall come to Zion, singing with songs of everlasting joy" (Doctrine and Covenants 45:71).
9. See Doctrine and Covenants 105:3–5. Scriptures have singled out caring for the poor and needy as being a necessary element of righteousness.
10. See Alma 36:30; see also 1 Nephi 2:20; Mosiah 1:7. The last part of Alma 36:30 reads, "Inasmuch as ye will not keep the commandments of God ye shall be cut off from his presence. Now this is according to his word."
11. Mosiah 2:41. President Lorenzo Snow (1814–1901) taught: "There is no Latter-day Saint who dies after having lived a faithful life who will lose anything because of having failed to do certain things when opportunities were not furnished him or her. In other words, if a young man or a young woman has no opportunity of getting married, and they live faithful lives up to the time of their death, they will have all the blessings, exaltation and glory that any man or woman will have who had this opportunity and improved it. That is sure and positive" (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Lorenzo Snow* [2012], 130). See also Richard G. Scott, "The Joy of Living the Great Plan of Happiness," *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 75.
12. See 1 John 5:2.
13. Mosiah 18:21; see also Moses 7:18.
14. 4 Nephi 1:16.
15. 4 Nephi 1:15.
16. 4 Nephi 1:24.
17. Moroni 9:13–14.
18. Russell M. Nelson, in "First Presidency and NAACP Leaders Call for Greater Civility, Racial Harmony," May 17, 2018, newsroom.ChurchofJesusChrist.org; see also "President Nelson Remarks at Worldwide Priesthood Celebration," June 1, 2018, newsroom.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
19. Doctrine and Covenants 90:11 reads, "Every man shall hear the fulness of the gospel . . . in his own language." Accordingly, language congregations are usually approved.
20. 2 Nephi 26:33.

21. See Constitution of the United States.
22. See United States Declaration of Independence (1776); Constitution of the United States, Amendments I–X (Bill of Rights), National Archives website, [archives.gov/founding-docs](https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs).
23. Doctrine and Covenants 101:77; emphasis added.
24. Doctrine and Covenants 101:79–80.
25. Doctrine and Covenants 101, section heading.
26. See *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days*, vol. 1, *The Standard of Truth, 1815–1846* (2018), 172–74; James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 2nd ed. (1992), 93–94; Ronald W. Walker, “Seeking the ‘Remnant’: The Native American during the Joseph Smith Period,” *Journal of Mormon History*, vol. 19, no. 1 (Spring 1993), 14–16.
27. See *Saints*, 1:359–83; William G. Hartley, “The Saints’ Forced Exodus from Missouri, 1839,” in Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Kent P. Jackson, eds., *Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer* (2010), 347–89; Alexander L. Baugh, “The Mormons Must Be Treated as Enemies,” in Susan Easton Black and Andrew C. Skinner, eds., *Joseph: Exploring the Life and Ministry of the Prophet* (2005), 284–95.
28. See *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days*, vol. 2, *No Unhallowed Hand, 1846–1893* (2020), 3–68; Richard E. Bennett, *We’ll Find the Place: The Mormon Exodus, 1846–1848* (1997); William W. Slaughter and Michael Landon, *Trail of Hope: The Story of the Mormon Trail* (1997).
29. John 17:21.
30. Doctrine and Covenants 38:27.
31. The Epistle to the Romans is comprehensive in declaring doctrine. Romans contains the only mention of the Atonement in the New Testament. I came to appreciate the Epistle to the Romans for unifying diverse people through the gospel of Jesus Christ when I served as a stake president with members from numerous races and cultures speaking many different languages.
32. Frederic W. Farrar, *The Life and Work of St. Paul* (1898), 446.
33. See Farrar, *The Life and Work of St. Paul*, 450.
34. See Romans 13.
35. See Dallin H. Oaks, “The Gospel Culture,” *Ensign*, Mar. 2012, 42–45; *Liahona*, Mar. 2012, 22–25; see also Richard G. Scott, “Removing Barriers to Happiness,” *Ensign*, May 1998, 85–87.
36. See Moses 7:18.