

World Conference 2007 Preparation
Share Christ, Share Peace
February 21—March 24 Daily Meditations

Introduction

What do you think of when you hear the word “discernment”? Does it belong to the realm of mystics, or is it only the privilege of a few? Perhaps you have to be ordained to a particular priesthood office or be one of the leaders of the church to be allowed to “discern.”

As a prophetic people, we are called to bear witness of Christ and confirm God’s presence in the world. One way this is accomplished is through discernment. In just thirty-two days World Conference participants will convene to pray, worship, work, play, legislate, and discern together. As Conference attendees and supporters, we will have many opportunities to demonstrate our commitment to share Christ and share peace.

Part of the World Conference experience is being with sisters and brothers from around the world—many worshiping with the larger family of the World Church for the first time. Some come to see the Temple they helped build with their donations. Many more come from small congregations where they have not before had the opportunity to partake of the sacrament of Communion in the company of so many diverse cultures. Still others join the Conference activities through live Internet streaming. To hear the drums, stringed instruments, lofty voices, and pipe organs create wondrous sounds, fills the hearts of Conference participants and viewers with warmth and joy. World Conference is truly a wealth of worldwide relationships—a weeklong celebration of Christ’s peace.

The following scriptures, reflections, actions, and prayer thoughts have been provided in preparation for this sacred and special time. Use this material each day before World Conference, beginning on Ash Wednesday, February 21, to participate with others around the church in disciplined efforts of discernment so God’s desires for our world and church might emerge. May this resource help you be open and receptive to God’s Spirit, and may God bless our journey toward World Conference.

Unless otherwise noted, Bible scripture verses are from the NRSV:

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Wednesday, February 21, 2007

Ash Wednesday

Scripture: As a prophetic people you are called, under the direction of the spiritual authorities and with the common consent of the people, to discern the divine will for your own time and in the places where you serve.

—Doctrine and Covenants 162:2c

Reflection: On Ash Wednesday, we begin the season of Lent—a forty-day period of introspection and preparation leading to Easter. “It is a season of being changed and emptied so that new life might come to birth in us and resurrection be found in us as well” (Wendy M. Wright, *The Rising*, 17). It is also a day to begin our spiritual preparation for World Conference. Whether you are attending the Conference or supporting it with your prayers and contributions, this Ash Wednesday launches our journey to begin a process of discerning God’s will.

As part of any discernment process, we face the possibility of change. The church has experienced a number of changes over the last decade. To name just a few examples: stakes, regions, and districts are now mission centers; new World Church leaders have been called and ordained; and the church has changed its name.

Many are frightened by changes and feel alienated by them. However, one thing has not and never will change: God’s love for each of us. God recognizes us no matter our location, our position in life, or what we call ourselves. God never leaves us alone. So, as change comes, we are able to stand firm in the knowledge of God’s love for us. Also, God continues to call us to the “great and marvelous work” of restoration, to proclaim Jesus Christ, and to be people of peace, reconciliation, and healing of the spirit.

We are asked to participate in the process of discernment, joining with the leaders of the church, the priesthood, and the membership, eagerly inviting God’s Spirit to move among us as we attempt to “Listen to the Voice” (Doctrine and Covenants 162:1b). Today, Ash Wednesday, let us begin the Lenten journey and our preparation for World Conference.

Come, let us listen together.

Action: In a journal, or aloud with your family, share a time when you sensed God’s movement in your life. What changes did this experience bring about in your life?

Prayer: Ask for God’s help in discovering and discerning the sacredness of the church’s calling to be a prophetic people. Pray for an understanding of what changes are needed in your life to be able to claim this prophetic mission.

Thursday, February 22, 2007

Scripture: Behold, I say to you, and also to those who have desires to bring forth and establish this work; no one can assist, except they be humble and full of love, having faith, hope, and charity, being temperate in all things entrusted to their care.

—Doctrine and Covenants 11:4, adapted

Reflection: A tree has died. An oriental horticulture book recommends planting another tree in the place of the dead one. Then, tie rocks to four branches, one on each side of the tree, so it will grow healthy, grounded, and balanced.

An interesting idea: Could there be a parallel in our lives? How do we become healthy, balanced, and grounded? The above scripture provides some insight: to be temperate and do nothing in excess. That is, we must work as well as play, pray as well as study, spend time with family as well as friends and co-workers, and teach our children to do the same—especially by example!

Unfortunately, it isn't as simple as tying rocks on our limbs. It takes discipline to balance our spiritual, family, personal, and professional lives. However, the discipline is always worth it, because in moments when we *are* healthy, grounded, and balanced, we have the potential of experiencing Christ's peace.

Action: Look over your schedule for the week. Notice where you spend too much time and where you spend too little time. Decide what changes you can make to correct the imbalance.

Prayer: Pray, this day, for the strength and discipline to seek the peace of Jesus Christ through healthy, grounded, and balanced living.

Friday, February 23, 2007

Scripture: And when you fast, don't look depressed like the hypocrites. They deliberately neglect their appearance to let everyone know that they are fasting. The truth is, they have already received their reward. But when you fast, brush your hair and wash your face. Don't let anyone know you're fasting except your God, who sees all that is done in secret. And God—who sees everything that is done in secret—will reward you.

—Matthew 6:16–18 The Inclusive New Testament

Reflection: Fasting is refraining from doing something that is part of your daily life so the mere act of *not* doing it brings God into your awareness. In Orthodox Judaism, the fast is seen as a way to turn people to God by focusing attention through light suffering. Before beginning a fast, establish the reasons for the fast and what you will refrain from. In the moments of missing or loss during the fast, use prayer, meditation, journaling, or other spiritual disciplines. They can help focus your thoughts on God and the reason for fasting.

Action: Next Sunday has been designated as the Day of Fasting and Prayer in preparation for World Conference. Participating in this fasting and prayer time is a good way to spiritually prepare for World Conference. Imagine the power of a worldwide fast by people of Community of Christ on behalf of the World Conference!

So, before Sunday, plan your fast: spend quiet time with family, turn off the television, or refrain from a meal. Whatever your chosen fast, focus on God's desire to be present, enlightening your understanding.

Prayer: Pray for the World Conference delegates who are charged with the legislative matters of the church. Ask for particular blessings of safe travel and strength for the rigors and long hours

of the legislative meetings. Pray for God's inclusion in the legislative and discernment processes of the Conference.

Saturday, February 24, 2007

Scripture: Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God.

—Isaiah 41:10

Reflection: Fear is a powerful emotion. A *Wall Street Journal* article a few years ago reported on a survey in which men and women from all walks of life were asked, "What is it you fear most?" The fear of death was number three. Can you guess what one and two were? Number two was fear of loneliness. Number one was the fear of failure.

What will happen if our plans fail? What will people think? How can I value myself when I have failed? How could God still value me?

Some of life's most meaningful lessons are learned through failure. Perhaps when we fail we are humbled and learn more than we do in an easy success.

Over and over again the words, "Do not be afraid," appear in the scriptures as God interacts with human beings. God's Spirit was present during times of fear with Mary, Jesus' mother; the shepherds on the hillside of Bethlehem; the disciples in a boat during a storm; the women at the tomb; and the gathered disciples locked away in a room after the Resurrection. Apparently, we humans are not very good at handling the unexpected and become fearful. Perhaps we need to give our fears to God and prepare to receive the peace of Jesus Christ.

Action: Today, when you feel fearful, stop. Take a deep breath. Let it out slowly. Recall God's assurance: "Do not be afraid." Breathe in God's peace.

Prayer: Turn your fears over to God in prayer. Ask to experience God's peace.

Sunday, February 25, 2007

Day of Fasting and Prayer in Preparation for World Conference

Scripture: Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive.

—Matthew 21:22

Reflection: Expectations are important. They help us articulate and, subsequently, value experiences. If we enter God's presence expectantly, our eyes and ears are more prepared and ready to receive. We are more attuned to the movement of God's Spirit.

As we consider the upcoming World Conference, what are our expectations? These daily meditations during the Lenten season are meant to prepare us to approach the World Conference experience expectantly and prayerfully—ready to receive.

The First Presidency has designated today as a Day of Fasting and Prayer on behalf of the approaching World Conference. On this first Sunday of Lent, let us pray that we may be led by the Spirit in our World Conference preparations. In the days ahead, may we listen for and begin to discern what God would have us know.

Action: Be intentional about fasting and prayer on behalf of the World Conference. Today, as you travel to church, stop a few moments before entering the sanctuary. Remember why you have come. Then, go in, prepared to meet God, not because the worship service is good or the preacher is great (though those will definitely help), but because you are prepared and expecting to meet God. Put no restrictions on how this will happen; only believe that it will. After the service, sit in silence for a moment before continuing into your day. Where did you meet God?

Prayer: Consider the words from Matthew, above. Form prayers that help articulate your expectations for World Conference. Ask in faith believing that the World Conference and the church will be blessed.

Monday, February 26, 2007

Scripture: For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.

—Jeremiah 29:11

Reflection: God has a plan, a vision for the world and the church—it is shalom. The vision is holistic and pervasive and involves all aspects of our lives. This has been described as Zion—God’s reign on earth.

Sometimes it is difficult for us to see God’s plan amidst the segmented realities of our lives. But, as disciples, we feel drawn into the possibilities of the future. Vision has been described as “the enhanced ability to describe the present situation and the desired future in a way that inspires action” (Richard Kriegbaum, *Leadership Prayers*, 60). One possible result of the World Conference in March is the formation of a people of action, motivated by an understanding of God’s vision.

Action: Practice understanding God’s vision and plans. Using a journal, quickly record your responses and reactions to the question: What is God trying to show us? The “us” could be disciples or a congregation or a mission center or the entire denomination. Look closely at your responses. What insights are there? What is your testimony of the emerging understanding of God’s shalom?

Prayer: Pray for God to show the way. In your prayers, remember the World Church leadership and staff in Independence who are preparing for World Conference. Lift them up for a blessing of wisdom, strength, and insight. Pray for God’s purposes to be fulfilled.

Tuesday, February 27, 2007

Scripture: My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.

—John 10:27

Reflection: How many times have you picked up the phone and knew who was on the line by hearing the caller speak? You recognized the voice; you've heard it so often. You have no doubt about who is calling.

One of the important facets of discernment is learning to recognize God's voice. A good method for initiating yourself into the recognition of God's voice is to use your favorite version of the Bible and read one of the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. Read them out loud if possible.

As you read the scriptures, you will notice a tone, a pattern to the language, a cadence to the poetry that, once heard, is recognized when you hear it again. It "feels" a certain way. It "looks" a certain way. You will begin to recognize "the Voice" as it is represented by the writer of the Gospel you are reading. You will become familiar with the way God interacts with people and incorporate hearing God's voice into your life.

Action: Begin reading the Gospel of your choosing out loud to yourself and with your family. Be aware of the voice and action taking place. Read it for the good story it is. Read it and listen for God's voice.

Prayer: Pray that the discipline of scripture reading will help you discern God's voice. Uphold the needs of the church as members strive to hear and understand God's call through the precious gift of scripture.

Wednesday, February 28, 2007

Scripture: But when you pray, go to your room, shut the door, and pray to God who is in that secret place, and your God—who sees all that is done in secret—will reward you.

—Matthew 6:6 The Inclusive New Testament

Reflection: Moses prayed with his arms raised to God. David prayed lying on his bed. Sometimes he even danced. The prophets prayed in freedom, in captivity, in torture, and in exile. African brothers and sisters dance and sing their prayers before God. Jesus prayed standing and on his knees—and on a cross.

It would seem that there are no scriptural restrictions as to how we present our prayers to God, only that we do it. The body posture for each of these prayers matched the pray-er's intentional approach to the Divine.

Have you ever done as the psalms direct and lifted your hands spontaneously in praise? Have you ever been driven to your knees or even flat to the ground by the intensity of your prayer? How long has it been since you knelt by your bed or bowed your head in prayer?

Take a look at your body posture when you pray. Why do you move the way you move? What is it you intend? Does your body reflect this intention?

Action: Turn to Psalm 23 and read it aloud. Read it aloud a second time, using your body posture to illustrate the actions suggested in the psalm.

Prayer: Try the following prayer position: Begin by bowing your head. But, instead of folding your hands in prayer, cup them. Mentally place in your hands the concerns for brothers and sisters around the world, and pray for them. If you are not a person who visualizes well, write out your prayer and place it in your hands. Sit quietly for a few moments looking into your cupped hands or with your eyes closed in silent meditation. Now raise your hands and turn your concerns over to God in prayer.

Thursday, March 1, 2007

Scripture: Be still, and know that I am God!

—Psalm 46:10

Reflection: Sometimes we have to slow down and be still in order to be aware of what is happening around us. One meditative exercise that can increase awareness is known as the Zen Tea Ceremony.

Experiencing the Zen Tea Ceremony is a good way to become aware of what it takes to bring tea to the table, ready to drink. Viewed in this manner, drinking the tea is like the last act in a play that may have taken years to compose. The awareness of this process turns the actual drinking of the tea into an act of thanksgiving.

To illustrate: In the tea ceremony the tea is brought to you and is served in porcelain cups. The porcelain is made from a special clay formed by the earth over thousands of years. When fired, it yields a beautiful white color.

Generations of craftsmen, experimenting with various clays, helped determine the best choice for the porcelain. The clay was dug by someone. The pigments for the glaze were made by someone, and a craftsman formed the pieces.

Wood from trees that grew and were nurtured by the earth for many years was used to fire the porcelain. It was glazed and fired again. Then, the set was packaged in excelsior and crated in wood to be sent to the market to sell. Someone else unpacked it in the shop where they selected their goods with care from the best craftsmen.

It is now at least an hour or maybe two into the ceremony, if the meditations on each aspect of the ceremony are in-depth. And we have yet to consider the tea leaves themselves, the water, the fire, and their preparation.

After such preparation and awareness of the gifts behind the ceremony, can you drink the tea with anything but thanksgiving? Awareness, then, is the birthplace of gratitude to God for your blessings. Be gracious and grateful.

Action: Place a treasured object in front of you. Take a few moments to become aware of how this object was created and came into your possession. Consider the people, places, and processes involved.

Prayer: Offer prayers of gratitude as you become aware of the many people who have blessed your life. Can you sense the Divine presence? Ask that such awarenesses of the Divine presence bless you as you prepare for World Conference.

Friday, March 2, 2007

Scripture: Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him....[Then he said,] "For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them."
—John 13:3–5, 15–16

Reflection: The Mosaic law is filled with cleansing rituals: bathe regularly, wash your hands before you prepare or eat food, wash them again after you touch meat, and keep raw meat on separate plates from the other foods. These laws were strictly observed by the Jewish people. We think of them today as just common sense—in this knowledgeable world that understands the nature of bacteria and viruses.

The washing of feet was a cleansing ritual common in the time of Christ. It was a form of hospitality to wash the feet of a guest when they entered your home, because most people wore sandals or went shoeless and the unpaved roads were dusty. As was his habit, Jesus took this common household courtesy and turned it into a symbolic act during the last supper with his disciples. He washed their feet to show them that the posture of a true follower of his was not to be served, but to be servant.

A true cleansing ritual is symbolic of the cleansing that takes place within us as well as without. Baptism is basically a cleansing ritual made sacramental by the depth of the spiritual cleansing and its connection to the Divine.

Action: Slowly go through the motions of washing your hands. As the water rinses away the dirt, germs, and unseen bacteria from your hands, ponder how it is that God grants you forgiveness. Consider ways of using your hands in service for others. Whose hands might you wash?

Prayer: Pray for God's help in discovering your calling as a servant minister. Keep the World Conference service project—the Habitat for Humanity home—in your prayers.

Saturday, March 3, 2007

Scripture: Continue your journey, O people of the Restoration. You have been blessed thus far but there is so much yet to see, so much yet to do. Go forth with confidence and live prophetically as a people who have been loved, and who now courageously choose to love others in the name of the One you serve. Amen.
—Doctrine and Covenants 162:8c

Reflection: Going on a journey is similar to the experience of seeking God. However, instead of experiencing a journey as a way to get someplace, it may be helpful to consider it as a goal in and of itself.

The Buddhists practice Vipassana meditation. During this meditation walk, an awareness of the actual motion of the body, the feel of it in reference to its surroundings, the way the muscles contract and relax as they keep the body in balance are identified. The attention is inward and, like the Zen Tea Ceremony where the goal is not the tea, the goal of Vipassana is not the destination; the focus is the taking of the journey.

The pilgrimage is found in most, if not all, religious traditions. From the Native American Vision Quest to the Islamic trek to Mecca to our own church history caravans, visiting the sacred sites that form the history of our faiths is more than a tradition. It is a path for renewing and rededication to that faith in which we claim a part.

The Community of Christ Temple has incorporated a meditation walk leading to the sanctuary. The worshiper's path is a place of preparation for worship and encountering the Divine. It demonstrates the potential resident within the powerful symbol of the Temple, but also serves as a reminder to all of us, no matter our location, to be intentional and aware of our journey with the Divine.

Action: Plan a meditation walk for tomorrow, before you enter your church. On your walk, begin with a short prayer for guidance. Then, take special notice of the things that come to your attention. Stop when you feel moved to stop. This is not a walk to exercise your body. It is a moving meditation to make you aware of the space your body takes up in this world, an awareness of your connection to the Divine. Take your time. When you arrive at church, consider how your journey has made you more aware of the Divine and prepared you for worship. Will this Sunday's worship experience be any different for you because of your "journey"? What difference does intentional preparation make to your worship experiences? What difference might it make to World Conference experiences?

Prayer: Pray for sisters and brothers worldwide that our minds, hearts, spirits, and bodies may be open to the infusion of the Spirit. Pray for the church as we come together in the Temple at World Conference: whether in person, through the Internet, or in supporting prayer, so we may be aware of the powerful presence of the Divine.

Sunday, March 4, 2007

Scripture: There are many lives waiting to hear the redeeming words of the gospel, or to be lifted from hopelessness by the hands of loving servants. But they will be lost to you without the generous response of disciples who share from their own bounty that others may know the joys of the kingdom.

—Doctrine and Covenants 162:7a

Reflection: Stewardship encompasses our responsibility to the earth and each other. Doctrine and Covenants 162 calls us to evaluate our stewardship and become generous disciples. This text helps us understand that we are 100 percent God's. Everything we have and everything we are comes from God. We have been given the responsibility to care for it. What we do with these blessings is our response to what God did for us in Christ.

A Disciple's Generous Response is articulated in these six principles:

1. A disciple practices generosity as a spiritual discipline in response to God's grace and love.
2. A disciple is faithful in response to Christ's ministry.
3. A disciple's financial response, while unique to individual circumstances, expresses love of God, neighbor, creation, and oneself.
4. A disciple shares generously through tithing so that others may experience God's generosity.
5. A disciple saves wisely in order to create a better tomorrow for self, family, the church's mission, and the world.
6. A disciple spends responsibly as a commitment to live in health and harmony with God and the world (<http://www.CofChrist.org/generosity/>).

These principles encompass every aspect of our lives and illustrate what is expected of us in the formation of good stewardship of our bodies, minds, and creation. How will we respond to God's call?

Action: Beside the six principles above, jot down notes about your generosity as a disciple. Make a pledge to act on any direction you glean from your notes.

Prayer: Ask God for direction in understanding your generous response. Pray for a softened heart and awareness of the needs around you. Sing or read "Soften My Heart" (*Sing a New Song*, 47) as a prayer.

Monday, March 5, 2007

Scripture: So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.

—Luke 11:9

Reflection: The word “pray” is a verb. When you pray, be prepared to act on your prayer. People who pray can make themselves available to God and provide a catalyst for change. How often do you lift your voice in prayer to God? Do you have a set time when you pray?

The Daily Prayer for Peace is offered in the Community of Christ Temple. Since December 1993, this service has been a powerful witness of the church’s commitment to pursue peace. The impact of this daily discipline goes far beyond Community of Christ, its members, the immediate geographic area, and the people gathered in the sanctuary. Even if only a few people are present for the service on a particular day, around the world interested people know about this prayer for peace and pause a moment to join in prayer.

Action: Set a specific time to pray today. Look up today’s Prayer for Peace service that will be shared in the Temple on the Internet (<http://www.CofChrist.org/prayerpeace>). Adapt the service to suit you and your family’s prayer patterns. Consider establishing a daily discipline of praying for peace.

Prayer: Lift your voice in a prayer for peace along with people worldwide. Recognize that there are many aspects of Christ’s peace—spiritual and physical healing, cessation of violence, reconciliation in relationships, and so on. Pray for a greater understanding of how to share Christ’s peace.

Tuesday, March 6, 2007

Scripture: “Pray then in this way:
Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.”

—Matthew 6:9

Reflection: Perhaps the best known verbal prayer in Christianity began as a simple, yet sincere request by one of Jesus’ disciples, “Lord, teach us how to pray.” What followed became more than just a lesson in what a prayer should be. It became a prayer in its own right, handed down through the Christian oral tradition until it was written into the New Testament. For some of us, it is the first prayer we learned, and maybe even the only prayer we have memorized. Yet, how many of us truly understand that the Lord’s Prayer is also a lesson in prayer? Let’s consider this prayer and how it can inform our praying. The following is taken from the Inspired Version:

1. “Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name.”—This is a time for praising God and more. For the word father used here is very personal, more like a “my Papa” than the usual meaning of “Father” would imply. So we bring our thanks and praise.
Action: Sing a hymn of praise or recite a psalm of praise.

2. “Thy kingdom come.”—This is a prayer for the coming of Zion, the peaceable kingdom, shalom, or God’s reign on earth.
Action: Pray that as we form a World Conference community, we will have a fuller understanding of Zion and shalom.
3. “Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven.”—Here is a prayer for God’s will to be done. This could be a difficult prayer, since it indicates the need for our repentance. But it is powerful if prayed on a daily basis.
Action: What are the attributes of “heaven on earth”? Pray for God’s help in understanding Zion.
4. “Give us this day, our daily bread.”—We are reminded that God provides all that we have.
Action: Offer intercessory prayer on behalf of those you know to be in need.
5. “And forgive us our trespasses”—When we enter God’s presence, we become immediately aware of our own sinfulness.
Action: Ask forgiveness for those things in your life that are separating you from the Divine.
6. “As we forgive those who trespass against us.”—God forgives us and we must follow this example and forgive others.
Action: Ask God for strength to be able to forgive those who have wounded you.
7. “And suffer us not to be led into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”—This is a prayer that we may trust the Spirit’s guidance and support when we are tempted to turn our backs to God.
Action: Pray for discernment that decisions may be made with the Spirit’s guidance.
8. “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever”—Ending with praise is a powerful way to go forth from a prayer.
Action: Turn to the Psalms or a hymn and express your praise out loud!
9. “Amen.”—This word is Greek for “so be it.” It is an act of confirming that the words of the prayer should now become part of us—real and incarnate.
Action: What difference does this prayer make in your life? How can these words be made real through you?

As Jesus shared this prayer with his disciples, there is a sense that he was sharing a personal and precious part of himself and helping us all to better understand our relationship with God.

Action: Go through the nine steps above. Use the Lord’s Prayer as a template for your own prayer experience.

Prayer: Pray the Lord’s Prayer aloud, keeping in mind the needs and challenges facing the church. Ask that God’s will be done through the actions and activities of the World Conference.

Wednesday, March 7, 2007

Scripture: O Lord, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; my soul within me is like a weaned child.

—Psalm 131:1–2, adapted

Reflection: This is called the Psalm of Quiet Trust. Meister Eckhart said:

You can never trust God too much. Why is it that people do not bear fruit? It is because they have not trust either in God or in themselves.

What areas of your life are you reluctant to trust to God? When have you felt God “calm and quiet” your soul? How can you share this peace—Christ’s peace—with others?

Action: Center your thoughts on the peace of Jesus Christ as you have experienced it. Breathe deeply. Sing this song or meditate on the text:

*There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole;
There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sinsick soul.
Sometimes I feel discouraged, and think my work’s in vain,
But then the Holy Spirit revives my soul again.*

*There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole;
There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sinsick soul.
If you can’t preach like Peter, if you can’t pray like Paul,
Just tell the love of Jesus and say he died for all.*

*There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole;
There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sinsick soul.*

American Folk Hymn
English, *Hymns of the Saints*, 147
French, *Chantons Tous Ensemble*, 43
Spanish, *Mil Voces para Celebrar*, 262

Prayer: Ask God for the strength to surrender and fully trust God’s grace. Pray a prayer of quiet trust.

Thursday, March 8, 2007

Scripture: Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing.

—Psalm 100:1–2

Reflection: The psalmist says, “Make a joyful noise!” From plain songs and chants to rock and rap, from drums and cymbals to pipe organs and pianos, music has been an important part of worship. Throughout our lives, beloved songs demonstrate a call to closeness with God in a way that nothing else does.

During a past World Conference, participation in the Conference choir brought to life the African chant: “Siyahamb’ ekukhanyen kwenkhos” (“We are Marching in the Light of God,” *Sing a New Song*, 46). The African drums, rain sticks, and other native instruments from around the world blended with the organ in the Auditorium to give a taste of the joy of being able to march forth in God’s light with passion and joy. In true World Conference fashion, attendees were able to “Make a joyful noise!”

Action: What is your favorite Christian song? Why is it so meaningful to you? Hum the tune and run through the words in your mind. Then sing your memorable song out loud. Make a joyful noise!

Prayer: Pray for joy as you “come into God’s presence with singing.” Envision and pray for the blending of voices and lives during World Conference so all may feel part of the community, whether in person or through the broadcasts and Internet.

Friday, March 9, 2007

Scripture: “And when you pray, don’t babble like the Gentiles. They think God will hear them if they use a lot of words. Don’t imitate them. Your God knows what you need before you ask it.”

—Matthew 6:7–8 The Inclusive New Testament

Reflection: As the scripture illustrates, the words of our prayers are not as important as the intention behind them. God looks into the heart of our prayers. Instead of always approaching God with words, it may be helpful to begin in silence.

When the proponents of Buddhism and Hinduism named their practice of sitting patiently with the intention of oneness with all, the closest word they could find to describe what they were doing was meditation. The discipline of Eastern meditation involves sitting quietly while emptying the mind of all thought. It is a very gentle experience.

The mind is quieted so that busy thoughts of daily life do not overrun interaction with the Divine. Regular practice of Eastern meditation leaves the mind better organized, clearer, and quieter.

Action: Practice sitting quietly. Imagine you are a mountain next to a quiet stream. Observe the stream the way the mountain would see it. Let the quietness that is resident in the way a mountain sits through time be the quietness that fills you. If you find your mind wandering to the things you have to do today, gently draw your mind back to that quietness and let it touch you deeply. If the distraction is too persistent, write it down so that you won't forget it, and then return to your meditation. If you have children, have them draw a picture of the mountain and then play a game pretending to be that mountain. Can you imagine God's presence in your mountain scene? What peacefulness do you sense? How do you feel being in God's presence?

Prayer: Rather than asking or directing prayer thoughts, empty your mind and spend time in God's presence.

Saturday, March 10, 2007

Scripture: He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

—Matthew 13:31–32

Reflection: One intriguing Zen practice is using the Koan. A Koan is a statement, story, or question that is meant to enhance meditation by placing before the practitioner a question that cannot be solved rationally. While many view this as a waste of time, in reality, the response sought is a many-layered response that changes with time, place, and experience. This time, you may respond to the challenge with a poem. Another time you may respond to the same challenge with a story or even a word. It does not matter. What matters is that it assists you in giving place to some new understanding.

Much of Jesus' teaching was in parables. The parables could be considered the equivalent of a Koan. Each time we study Jesus' parables, we may see something new because between readings, we have changed, the church has changed, and the world has changed. The rich blessing of scripture is that it continues to speak to us all of our days. Our responses to scripture are multi-layered based on time, place, and experience, just like the Koan. Our understanding is organic—impacted by the events in the world, the church, and our lives. Each time we read the parables, we can emerge with new ideas and insights. We are lifelong learners, seeking growth in our understandings.

Action: Offer a short prayer for understanding to establish your intention for this meditation. Contemplate the parable of the mustard seed for five minutes (Matthew 13:31–32). Don't analyze it. Just read it through, and then sit quietly—letting it roll through your mind. Let feelings, pictures, words, and other stories come to the surface of your mind. At the end of the five minutes, write down your thoughts. There is no one correct understanding or right answer.

Prayer: When faced with questions that seemingly have no resolution, pray for growth in your understanding. Ask for a similar blessing for the World Conference as we discern God's will together.

Sunday, March 11, 2007

Scripture: “But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.”

—Mark 13:24–27

Reflection: The symbolic use of the four seasons in prayer language has long been the tradition of many indigenous cultures. Each season represents a part of life.

In winter we find sadness and defeat. It is the season of death, survival, and waiting. Winter tests us and builds our strength as we await spring.

Spring is the season of success, victory, power, and reawakening. Here we find new life and new birth—a place of new beginnings.

In summer we find peace, happiness, serenity, and plenty. Here life is at its peak.

In autumn we find death, the harvest, and the end of the cycles. It is also the season from which rain comes.

These seasons, when seen as symbols, can enhance meditation.

In life we travel the circuit of the four seasons—life and loss—many times. They are all connected. All seasons and parts of life draw us back to God.

Action: Examine your life for those things that are concerning you right now. Write a prayer for these concerns, and find the season that symbolically represents your concerns. Offer the prayer you have written. Let the Spirit comfort you.

Prayer: It is a challenge each World Conference to make the worship services truly meaningful to all of the people. Translators, inclusive language, and intercultural worship can only go so far. The rest of the distance is bridged by love. We share a meal. We bow in prayer. We touch hands. We cry and laugh together. We are a family. Pray that we listen with our ears, but also remain open to the feelings of our hearts. Pray that the diverse seasons represented by our lives will have God at the center, and we will experience God's shalom.

Monday, March 12, 2007

Scripture: Send forth your light and your truth—let them guide me, let them bring me to your holy mountain, to your dwelling place.

—Psalm 43:3 The Inclusive Psalms

Reflection: As we continue preparing for World Conference and move through the Lenten season, the light we seek is part of the journey of discernment. It is God's light that helps transform our finite understandings and limited experience into revelation—God's revelation.

The Community of Christ believes that the Sacred Story is not finished yet. There are chapters yet to be written, and we are invited to let ourselves become part of that process. From the time of the first followers of Jesus through the long centuries until today, the meaning of God's revelation in Jesus Christ has been continuously unfolding. Hence we speak of *continuing revelation*. Wherever God's activity is faithfully proclaimed and received, people begin to see themselves differently: as connected with all creation, as those who are loved, forgiven, and called to play their own small but vital part in the Sacred Story.

—Anthony Chvala-Smith, *Understanding the Way: Exploring Our Christian Faith*, 15.

Action: Light a candle and consider the flame. Think of a time when God's light (God's revelation) changed your life. Based on this recollection, how might you discern God's involvement in your life today? How do you "fit" into the continuing revelation of the sacred story?

Hold your hands over the flame and feel the warmth (use caution!). Draw the warmth toward your body with a gesture of blessing. Pray for God's light to shine on you in the days ahead and to guide you into deeper relationship with the Divine.

Prayer: Fountain of all revelation, grant us thy life-giving power;
Without thee no sure salvation will deliver us this hour.
May no veil of our tradition mask the light that comes from thee!
Let not pride nor low ambition waste the strength that sets us free.

God our rock of revelation, we would build our lives on thee;
For without thy sure foundation none can find stability.
We will order not thy wisdom to some cherished form or mold,
But will search for truths now hidden as we live by those we hold.

Deam Ferris, *Hymns of the Saints*, 298.

Amen.

Tuesday, March 13, 2007

Scripture: Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

—Romans 8:26–27

Reflection: If prayers were dollars, I'd be bankrupt!
Oh, I know, now and then
 I go online and slip in a few praises,
 a couple of thank-yous, and a shopping list.
But shouldn't prayer be more than that?
A cool drink of water. A splash of sunset.
A dog's bark. A violin solo.

If prayer were seeing the color of morning,
 tasting the salt air of seaside,
 or feeling the bite of winter wind,
 I'd still be bankrupt.
It's happening all around me
 and I fail to drink it in.

Sipping life isn't prayer unless you taste it.
Let me roll it around on my tongue a little.
I really must turn the light on
 and see what's there.

I think if I could, that *would* be prayer!

—Danny Belrose, *Let the Spirit Breathe: Personal Psalms, Prayers, and Pieces*, 13.

Action: To increase your awareness, make a gratitude list for the *specific* gifts you received from God yesterday (air to breathe, health, friends, sunrise, etc.). Do you have enough paper for your list? Is there enough paper in the world? What would a “sigh too deep for words” sound and feel like? Try it.

Prayer: As you go through this day, pray for the sensitivity to recognize God's presence in your journey. Say a prayer of thanksgiving for God's continuing revelation in your life, in the church, and in the world.

Wednesday, March 14, 2007

Scripture: I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be

transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

—Romans 12:1–2

Reflection: Our view of ourselves as disciples who have been personally chosen by Jesus should alter our whole attitude toward him and motivate us strongly for the work which has been given us to do... The church today suffers because so many of its members feel they have somehow made the decision to join the church and follow Christ, rather than having a sense of being chosen. But it is only as we see ourselves chosen, called, and commissioned by Christ to be his disciples that we will want to stretch ourselves—make every effort to do whatever is required—even present our bodies a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God to accomplish the tasks that have been given to us.

—Wallace B. Smith, “International Perspectives on the Temple,” International Leadership Conference, 1988.

Action: Do you have a life mission statement? Think about and record your responses to the following questions (ask for the Holy Spirit’s help):

What are God’s designs for your life?

How are you being spiritually formed?

In what ways do you continue to magnify your calling?

With whom and in what circumstances does God use you to share Christ’s peace?

Read through your responses, praying for discernment. Craft a life mission statement that emerges out of your meditation.

Prayer: All are called, young and old, to see visions bright and bold
Of a time and a place where the Sacred shares all space.
For our time, for all time, God’s great and marvelous work
Burns within our hearts, burns within our hearts.

Quickened steps boldly take in our journey for Christ’s sake
New paths found, fresh hope shared, where the gospel is declared
Walking proud, standing tall, responding to God’s call:
“Love for love’s own sake, love for love’s own sake.”

Open minds, willing feet, venture forth to every street
Where the lost can be found, and the songs of hope resound.
Every soul in its place, enfolded by God’s grace
Is of precious worth, is of precious worth.

Standing firm in the name of the One we do proclaim
Gives us life, sets us free to embrace diversity.
Many names, cultures vast, bring insights to the task
Blessed with harmony, blessed with harmony.

—Danny A. Belrose, *Wave Offerings: Personal Psalms, Prayers, and Pieces*, 43.

May we be a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to you, O God. Amen.

Thursday, March 15, 2007

Scripture: So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. “Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.”

—Mark 11:24–25

Reflection: At the end of the day is a good time to reflect and work with the Holy Spirit to find what needs to be set straight in our lives. We can specifically work on a habit that needs changing, something that we have done (maybe without realizing it) for which we need forgiveness, or something that we need to forgive. If we have “ought against any,” we are supposed to get it straightened out before presenting our gifts to God.

The practice of Examen can be used to discern what separates us from God and help us grow closer to God. It is an opportunity to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit in reviewing our day, so that anything God wants us to notice about our day can be brought to mind. Here is an example of an Examen exercise.

1. Withdraw into a quiet space and meditate silently, invoking the Holy Spirit. You should develop an attitude of mind, open to the healing of any problem the Spirit presents to you.
2. Ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind anything that you need to be aware of from the activities of the day. You may begin this portion by performing a short run-through of the highlights of your day, holding each up to the Spirit’s light. You may also just want to sit quietly, waiting for whatever is brought to your mind about your day. The idea is to see your day through God’s eyes.
3. When anything is brought to your attention, examine it carefully and prayerfully. Analyze the elements: What was the incident? How did it begin? How did it end?
4. Work with the Spirit to determine what, if anything, you need to do about this situation. Do you need to ask God or anybody else for forgiveness? Do you need to forgive someone else?
5. Is there any way to prevent this situation from happening again? How might you act differently? respond differently?
6. Ask the Spirit for a gentle prodding to remind you of this situation in the future so that you can realize what is happening and stop the cycle.
7. Record what has transpired in your journal. This is helpful when you get discouraged. It will show you how far you’ve come.
8. Thank the Holy Spirit for helping you draw closer to God. Sit quietly for a moment before leaving the meditation.

Action: Reserve time at the end of the day to go through the above steps. Approach the Examen with an attitude of humility and a determination to act on what is brought to your mind.

Prayer: Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my thoughts.
See if there is any wicked way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.
Amen.

—Psalm 139:23–24

Friday, March 16, 2007

Scripture: In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.” And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

—Mark 1:9–13

Reflection: During the season of Lent, we are sent into desert places, much as Jesus was. We are asked to discern God’s voice among many competing sounds.

After the high moment of calling, it is not unusual to spend some time in the wilderness as Christ did following his baptism...It is usually a time of pain and struggle, one that not all survive. The pain and even sense of unworthiness can lead to refusal of the supreme task of our lives. We wonder, Why should I make the effort? Why should I sacrifice? Why should I expose myself in this way? But if we win through, we know a great deal more about spiritual maturity.

—Velma Ruch, *We Journey with Christ*, 32.

Action: If possible (do not risk your health!), fast from liquids for several hours. As you fast, consider these words: “Let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water’” (John 7:38).

At the conclusion of your fast, gather a pitcher of water, a glass, and a large bowl. Reverently pour about half of the water into the bowl. Listen to the sounds of the water. Watch how the light reflects off the water as it is poured. Say aloud: *All who are thirsty, come to the water.*

Consider your thirst and compare it to thirsting for God. Read aloud: “As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (Psalm 42:1–2). Slowly wash your hands in the bowl of water. Consider the meaning of washing away the temptations and sin that keep you separated from God.

Pour water from the pitcher into the glass, and drink it to break your fast and continue your pilgrimage.

Prayer: Ask for God's help in your desert moments, to turn weakness into strength. Pray for those who are beginning the pilgrimage to World Conference.

Saturday, March 17, 2007

Scripture: For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.

—Ephesians 3:14–17

Reflection: The spiritual discipline of contemplation creates a vortex of peace around which the hurricane of life whirls. Centering prayer is one way to approach contemplation. Centering prayer is done, as much as possible, without images or mental pictures. It brings us from the perimeter into the center. We exclude all the distractions and static around us and just “let go,” making it possible to focus on a point within us where we can discern God's presence.

Action: A Centering Prayer

1. Choose a sacred word on which to focus (for example, Alleluia or Emmanuel or Creator).
2. Sit comfortably with your eyes closed and gently introduce the sacred word. Let go of all that is going on around you. Inwardly repeat the sacred word.
3. When you become aware of thoughts, feelings, images, memories, reflections, and commentaries, let them go as you would release a balloon. Return, gently and without judgment, to your sacred word.
4. At the end of the prayer period, sit quietly with your eyes closed for a few more moments. This gives your mind a chance to readjust to your environment and still carry the atmosphere of inner peace into daily life.

Prayer: Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways. The Lord be with all of you (2 Thessalonians 3:16). Amen.

Sunday, March 18, 2007

Scripture: So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.

—Ephesians 2:17–20

Reflection: *Lectio divina* (Latin for “holy reading”), is a way of “praying the scriptures.” The central focus in lectio divina is a passage of scripture. The passage is read several times, each time using a different approach.

Action: Use Lectio divina with Ephesians 2:17–20.

1. Pray for the Holy Spirit’s presence and guidance.
2. Read the scripture aloud without studying it. Read it simply and attentively.
3. Read the scripture a second time. When a word, phrase, or passage catches your attention, stop and repeat those words silently to yourself, meditating on their meaning. What ideas or understandings come to you? Let the Spirit guide you as you meditate.
4. Read the scripture a third time. Pray about the meaning you have discovered. Seek God and pray in response to your thoughts and understandings.
5. Read the scripture a final time. Now rest in silent contemplation. Let the presence of the Spirit fill you. There is no expectation or goal except to be in God’s presence.
6. Let yourself come out of contemplation slowly. Journal any insights that have come to mind.

Prayer: Pray that as we prepare for the World Conference experience, we will have a fuller understanding of what it means to share Christ’s peace. Pray for open hearts and minds as we deliberate and discern together.

Monday, March 19, 2007

Scripture: Lift up your eyes and fix them on the place beyond the horizon to which you are sent. Journey in trust, assured that the great and marvelous work is for this time and for all time.

—Doctrine and Covenants 161:1a

Reflection: World Conference begins on Saturday. Church leaders from around the world have already arrived in Independence, Missouri, USA, to attend the International Leaders Meeting. Others are setting affairs in order, preparing to leave home. Others are using the church’s Web site to glean the most up-to-date information about the Conference. And still others are preparing video projectors and personal computers to be able to view the World Conference sessions online. The preparation and pilgrimage continue throughout this week.

Pilgrimage is defined as: “1. A journey to a sacred place or shrine. 2. Any long journey or search, especially one of exalted purpose or moral significance” (*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 1970).

Both as a church and as individuals we are called to pilgrimage, to walk in the way Christ not only showed us but which in reality he was.... True pilgrims will always walk in the tension between the already here and the not yet.... We hope in that journey to discover the richness of diversity centered in a common allegiance to Christ

and learn how to join the daring of the settler to the daring of the wanderer. That is the journey that is home.

—Velma Ruch, *Summoned to Pilgrimage: The Temple as Focus of a Pilgrim People*, pp. 9, 12, 14.

The 2007 World Conference stands ready to welcome pilgrims home—in person or through the Internet.

Action: Consider the experience of being away for an extended period of time. What are some positive things about being away? What are some negatives? How do you feel when you begin to prepare for the trip “home”? What is it about “home” that makes you yearn for it? How might World Conference represent “home”? Draw a picture of your version of “home” (be sure to involve children).

Prayer: Pray for World Conference pilgrims, whether literal travelers or supporters. Give thanks for your spiritual home.

Tuesday, March 20, 2007

Scripture: If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you.

—James 1:5

Reflection: A confused young boy looked to the scriptures for help and found this passage in James. He went to the grove and prayed for direction. The experience culminated in a vision that provided the direction he sought, “This is my beloved Son, hear him.” This spiritual awakening for young Joseph Smith led to a life of listening for the voice of Christ and the founding of this denomination.

In the Temple, at the entrance into the worshiper’s path is an etched glass representation of the sacred grove where Joseph first asked God what church to join. Entering this portal of peace reminds us of the journey each of us makes, walking the path of the disciple. Much like Joseph, we approach the Divine, aware of our questions and ready to listen.

What causes the grove of trees to become a place of spiritual awakening? There exists a peaceful calmness in the midst of the trees that is found only in a sanctuary: the cooling shade of the surrounding trees; the quiet, gentle sound of the wind in the leaves; and the sheltered, protected feeling of the grove. No wonder it seemed to be a place where one could meet God!

We start on the spiritual pilgrimage of this week by figuratively entering the sacred grove, to discover what God has in mind for us.

Action: Talk with your family or others in your congregation about what World Conference means to you and why it is so important to the life of the church. If you are not able to attend World Conference yourself, invite someone who is going to Conference, to eat a meal with you and your family. During the meal, share with them your thoughts and prayers for their preparations and any insights or discernment you have experienced in your meditations.

Prayer: Visualize the grove of trees, and mentally seek sanctuary within them. If you have trouble with the visualization process, try concentrating on the sounds you would hear if you were in the grove: leaves fluttering in the gentle breeze, insects buzzing nearby, and the occasional rustle of foliage. Pray for all those seeking sanctuary, needing to hear words of hope and healing. Ask God your questions and lift your sincere desires for the World Conference in prayer.

Wednesday, March 21, 2007

Scripture: “But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.’” So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.”

—Luke 15:17–20

Reflection: Next on the Temple worshiper’s path pilgrimage is an etching in polished dark marble of the prodigal son parable. We see before us the son, kneeling in repentance as his father rushes forward to greet him with outstretched arms. The artwork includes the wording, “Once was lost...now is found.”

This engraving echoes an art form known as iconography. It was developed as a way of illustrating scripture stories for people who could not read. The icon helped the person viewing it remember the entire story. Within the scene a small person was placed in one corner to show the worshiper what position to take, either physically or mentally, to assist in experiencing the story.

In this scene on the worshiper’s path, we might find ourselves in the position of the prodigal, repenting of the things that separate us from God. We come before God in humility and trust in God’s compassion. We are welcomed “home.”

Action: Find a personal symbol of the Divine Presence in your life (for example: a cross, a stone, a picture of a loved one, a landscape painting). Study the symbol and remember how it felt to come into God’s presence. Share your symbol with your family or friends, explaining why it is meaningful to you.

Prayer: I long for your presence, O God.
In the midst of my estrangement I seek to be connected.
Connected to you, connected to others, connected to self.
Why is it that I am so far from you?
What has caused this isolation of my heart?
How did my journey take me to this barren wasteland of loneliness?
I believe in your grace.

I believe in your need for my presence with you.
I believe in our partnership in all creative arts.
Give me courage, dear Friend, and insight too.
Courage and insight sufficient to explore the voids.
Courage and insight to understand my need for transformation.
Courage and insight to once again become intimate—
Intimate with you and all your beautiful creation.

—Kenneth McLaughlin

Thursday, March 22, 2007

Scripture: For in him [Jesus] God wanted all fullness to be found
and to reconcile all things through him,
whether in heaven or on earth,
making peace through his death on the cross.

—Colossians 1:19–20, adapted

Reflection: The Temple pilgrimage does not stop when we are welcomed home, but rather continues up the worshiper's path, coming to the foot of the cross.

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Set in a bed of rock, the cross towers over the pathway and casts its shadow. To continue up the pathway, one must walk through the shadow of the cross, for it is here that we come face to face with Jesus, the wounded healer. We may hesitate to enter the shadow of the cross, but find it is a necessary step on the journey.

Remembering the suffering and death of Jesus, we recognize the depth of his love for us.

The journey through the shadow of the cross
is a journey to the heart of love, to that wounded
healer who died that we might have life and
have it more abundantly.

—Velma Ruch, *Summoned to Pilgrimage: The Temple as Focus of a Pilgrim People*, 94.

Action: Place a cross in front of you. Be still within and without. Focus on the cross. Begin humming “Jesus, Remember Me” (*Sing a New Song*, 26). As you continue humming, hold the cross in your hands and contemplate what it means to you that Jesus “made peace through his death on the cross” (Colossians 1:20). Sing “Jesus, Remember Me” to end your meditation.

Prayer: Beneath the cross of Jesus I fain would take my stand—
The shadow of a mighty Rock within a weary land;
A home within the wilderness, a rest upon the way,
From burning of the noontide heat and burdens of the day.
Upon the cross of Jesus mine eye at times can see
The very dying form of One who suffered there for me;
And from my stricken heart with tears two wonders I confess—
The wonders of redeeming love, and my unworthiness.

I take, O cross, thy shadow for my abiding place.
I ask no other sunshine than the sunshine of his face.
Content to own no other place, to know no gain nor loss,
My sinful self my only shame, my glory all, the cross.

—Elizabeth C. Clephane, *Hymns of the Saints*, 428.

Amen.

Friday, March 23, 2007

Scripture: The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly,
and rejoice with joy and singing.

—Isaiah 35:1–2

Reflection: The spiraling journey up the Temple worshiper’s path now leads us to a particular type of beauty: Ikebana, a Japanese arrangement of flowers that is created intentionally to represent the coming together of heaven and earth. It is a garden of sorts.

It is very appropriate that our Lenten journey, which began in the wilderness, starts to blossom as we move closer to the events of Holy Week. What does it mean for flowers to bloom in the desert? What might it mean for us to bloom with spiritual maturity in the wilderness that, at times, makes up our lives?

The marvel is that we do not just behold beauty.
We are called to *be* beauty and thus become the
conduits through which the Divine can spiral beauty
back into the world. It is in this way that we
become a transparency of the face of God.

—Velma Ruch, *Summoned to Pilgrimage: The Temple as Focus of a Pilgrim People*, 117.

We are part of God’s great and marvelous works. On this final day before the beginning of World Conference, we take our place as disciples, “inspired by the life and witness of the Redeemer of the world” (Doctrine and Covenants 156:5e). We are beauty. Wherever we are, wherever we go, the peace of Jesus Christ is there.

Action: Go for a walk in a garden, if available. If not, visit a florist shop. As you appreciate the beauty, consider your life as a beautiful reflection of Christ to the world. As a world church, how might the coming World Conference resemble a collection of beautiful flowers? At the conclusion of your reflection, assemble or purchase a beautiful bouquet to remind you of the marvelous potential in the coming week to discern and share Christ’s Peace.

Prayer: Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord of hosts, almighty One!
Earth and firmament speak thy praise, Thy name is written in the sun.

Thou hast fashioned with thine own hand The earth below, the heavens
above;

Oh, how wonderful is thy power, And yet how tender is thy love.

O thou infinite, living God, Upon us now thy Spirit pour;
We would worship thee, laud and praise Thy holy name forever more.

Sing of his mighty love, for it is wonderful;
Let his praise through all the earth resound;
Honor and majesty now and forever be
Unto God whose love and mercy have no bound. Amen.

—Charlotte G. Homer, *Hymns of the Saints*, 48

Saturday, March 24, 2007

Scripture: Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”

—John 4:13–14

Reflection: We come, at last, to the end of our journey. We rest for a moment with Jesus, at the well. At the top of the Temple worshiper’s path, the waters flow and we are reminded of our commitment through the sacrament of baptism. We remember that at the well, Jesus promised to give living water to all who believed in him. The Temple’s pool of water includes the caption, “Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give...will never thirst.”

Think about that for a moment: “living water.” We know that bathing cleanses us, but there is more to bathing than cleansing. We know how it refreshes and energizes us when we are tired or soothes and relaxes us when we are stressed. We may not be able to explain it, but we know.

How much more important would it be to bathe in living water—to have our souls cleansed, refreshed, energized, or soothed and relaxed—our never-ending thirst eased? The fountain symbolizes all that we have come through to get to this place: our baptisms by water and fire, our prayerful preparation, and our meditation and contemplation.

All that we are is prepared.

In the Temple, the pool of water is the last step before entering the sanctuary. In our journey toward World Conference, we are finally ready for the opening worship service—ready to feel God’s presence and experience Christ’s peace.

Action: As the World Conference begins, take time to collect and consolidate your thoughts and hopes from these meditation experiences. Make notes that can be referred to after Conference with the thought of being able to identify insights and changes that take place in your life and in the life of the church during the week.

Prayer: Pray simply for the Holy Spirit to infuse our World Conference discernment and deliberations so that we are empowered to share Christ and share peace.

This pilgrimage of daily meditation has reached its destination. World Conference begins with the opening worship and legislative meeting this evening. May you continue to uphold the Conference in your prayers this week, and may you be blessed by God in the days ahead!