



Closing Challenge: Discover Your Future

President Steve Veazey delivered this sermon at World Conference on April 13 in Independence, Missouri.

From John 4:28–30 NRSV:

Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” They left the city and were on their way to him.

When the Samaritan woman met Jesus at the well, she discovered a hopeful future with new possibilities. Her first instinct was to go back to her city, tell others about her experience, and invite them to “come and see!” By doing that she helped usher in a new future for her family and community, too (John 4:1–42 NRSV).

When we spiritually connect to Jesus Christ and his community of disciples, our future becomes more than an extension of our past. New perspectives, possibilities, and networks of relationships emerge that alter the quality, direction, and priorities of our lives!

I especially am fascinated by the meaning of the last sentence of the passage from John. When people in the city heard the Samaritan woman’s witness of Jesus Christ as living water, “They left the city and were on their way to him” (John 4:30 NRSV).

They began traveling with hopeful intent. They began dramatically reorienting their lives toward Jesus. They became thirsty to discover him, the gift of living water, and to be part of his community of disciples.

We can approach this verse two ways. First, it is a statement of fact. Some physically left their homes and shops to journey with Jesus, wherever he was going! This is reminiscent of the fishermen who “immediately” dropped their nets, left their boats, and followed him in response to some mysterious inner spiritual urging (Matthew 4:18–22 NRSV).

Second, this verse can be understood as a statement of spiritual intent. The people from the city began spiritually awakening and moving toward Jesus as the hope and focus of their lives.

With that perspective, broader application becomes possible, and some provocative questions emerge. What is the spiritual attitude, trajectory, and focus of our lives? Are we enthusiastically on our way to Jesus in the priorities, character, and vision of our discipleship? As Community of Christ, are we listening and moving together toward Jesus in our relationships and concerns?

Like others, I’ve studied the Gospels and related works. And, as far as I can tell, the real Jesus—the one we claim to follow—does not always prevail in our daily choices, interactions, and priorities.

Many embrace Jesus Christ in their desires for personal salvation, protection, and well-being. At the same time, it is not unusual for many to excuse themselves from



Jesus' teachings when he insists we live compassionate and generous lives in inclusive community with others as indication of our love of God, neighbor, and enemy.

In my message last Sunday, I noted that the Samaritan woman came to the well at an odd time. Most came early in morning or the end of the day. She came mid-day. I suspect she came then to avoid the scorn of others because of her questionable marriage ethics.

However, after her living-water encounter with Jesus, she left her water jar beside the well, rushed back to her community, and urged others to venture out to meet Jesus, too (John 4:28–29 NRSV)! That certainly is a dramatic change in self-perception, priorities, and valuing of relationships. Remarkably, the ridiculed woman at the well became the source of living water for many Samaritans!

The love, message, and embrace of Jesus Christ are broad beyond measure. By their very nature they must be shared widely, or they are not being shared at all. They are not limited to just me, "my kind of people," or some preferred nation, culture, or race. If we truly are moving toward and with Jesus, then the church community constantly will venture beyond all kinds of perceived boundaries and horizons to invite others to drink deeply of Christ's life-giving water in loving community.

If we as Community of Christ truly are "on our way to him," then Jesus' passions and concerns will visibly be our passions and concerns (Doctrine and Covenants 164:9d). Any gaps between our views and his vision will be resolved as we move toward him! Not by trying to conform him to us. That's what it means to be "on our way to him!" It is ongoing personal and communal spiritual transformation in Christ as a life-long adventure!

When 2 Corinthians 5:17 NRSV states "...if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away..." it is talking about much more than personal salvation. It is proclaiming that if we truly are living and moving "in Christ" we are becoming a new kind of human being within a new kind of humanity. Ephesians 2:15 (NRSV) further illuminates this truth by describing the ultimate work of Christ to "create in himself one new humanity..., thus making peace."

Some authors conclude Jesus was the prototype or forerunner of a new "peaceful humanity." They emphasize Jesus' peaceful manner. Even when he experienced persecution and violence by crucifixion, he stayed true to his peaceful nature without returning violence for violence. His steadfastness on the cross as he suffered horrible violence reveals the truth that our common redemption and calling in Christ is to be "peaceful humanity."

What if baptisms, confirmations, and observances of the Lord's Supper in Community of Christ emphasized that calling in addition to conventional meanings? How might we think, speak, and interact differently as disciples of the peaceful One?

Scripture testifies that all creation waits "with eager longing" (Romans 8:19 NRSV) for peaceful humanity to appear on the world stage to turn the tide of hate, agony, and destruction. With that in mind, the central question raised by our text looms even larger. Are we moving toward Jesus, the peaceful One? Or are we retreating from Jesus by reverting to our old humanity and its destructive ways of interacting with others and creation? As Barbara Brown Taylor observed, "as long as we go on poisoning the planet of our birth and slaughtering one another..." we still have a lot of transforming to do!



As for this faith community, I continue to feel the Holy Spirit urging us to go much deeper and further in exploring, embodying, and sharing the peace of Jesus Christ in all the locations and vocations of our lives. As we do, we will discover the essential meaning of restoration. We will discover our best selves and brightest future. We will discover all the surprising ways that Christ-inspired community weaves diverse people together as expressions of the gospel of peace. And, we will discover deep community in Christ as a wellspring of living water, rising and revealing the currents of God's grace flowing through our lives.

May the love and peace of Christ urge us on in our quest for such community and bless us until we meet again!

Words of Counsel to the Church

(President Stephen M. Veazey delivered this addendum April 13 in Independence, Missouri.)

Several times during World Conference I have offered spoken messages through which perspective and guidance for the church has been presented. Throughout the week I have experienced the prompting of the Holy Spirit, indicating it would be good to emphasize certain concepts as we embark on the next phases of our faith adventure with God. I do not have any expectation regarding the ultimate status of what I will present to you now. If these words have enduring value for the church, they will find their place in the character, responses, and living canon of our lives.

To the church:

Beloved in Christ, for many years you longed for a temple to fulfill the hopes of generations. Now there is a Temple seeking fulfillment through a worldwide community that embodies divine light, generosity, and peace. Being a people of the Temple is a constant calling that finds creative expression through each generation.

Your continuing response to the call to be a people of the Temple is commendable and of eternal importance. When humans esteem themselves, each other, all interactions, and the entire creation as temple, peace prevails. This restoring vision and witness is entrusted to you.

Financial constraints are hindering the church from moving into the future at a pivotal and opportune time in history. These obstacles can be overcome through generosity, cooperation, and discernment about how the assets of the church can be directed to serve budget necessities and mission priorities.

Members, congregations, and church jurisdictions are called to live the stewardship principles and practices already given to you.

Technology presents opportunities for involvement in sacraments by priesthood members and participants in separate locations. The First Presidency will act in its calling as chief interpreters of scripture, revelation, and church policies to provide procedures for offering sacraments in new situations while upholding essential



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meanings and symbols of the sacraments. As the church explores new opportunities for sharing sacraments, direction will come as needed through inspiration and wisdom.

Additional meaning is waiting to be discovered in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Renewing covenant with Jesus Christ includes the call to live as peaceful human beings who personify Christ's peace.

Spiritual blessing will be experienced when this call is emphasized as a vital aspect of the sacrament. Cherish opportunities to be spiritually formed by Christ's sacred meal of remembrance, reconciliation, renewal, and peace.

Then go with conviction into the locations of your discipleship and be the peace of Christ. As you do, you will discover a variety of ways in which spiritual community forms and flows as expressions of the gospel of peace.

Trust what is being born. Have faith in divine purposes. Persist in Hope.

Amen.