



Community of Christ

Historic Sites Foundation

Forgive Each Other: Lessons from the Past

Community of Christ Heritage Day

Sunday, September 17, 2017

Prelude & Gathering

Congregational Life (Announcements)

Welcome and Call to Worship:

While welcoming the congregation, the worship leader should introduce the annual Heritage Day service and the “Forgive Each Other” theme for the service. The stories from today’s worship service are rooted in our faith community’s testimony of forgiveness, reconciliation and healing of the spirit.

Scriptural Reading: Doctrine & Covenants 162:5a-c

“Do not be defined by the things that separate you but by the things that unite you in Jesus Christ. Over and over again you have been counseled to be reconciled, to seek the unity that is imperative to the building of the kingdom. Again the Spirit counsels the church to not allow the forces of division to diver you from your witness. Listen together to one another, without judgment or predisposition. Do not assume that the answers to matters of conflict have yet been perceived. There is much labor to be done Reason together in love, and the Spirit of truth will prevail.”

From our early beginnings as a faith community, God has encouraged us to humble ourselves, forgive one another, and to heal wounded relationships. Throughout our sacred story, we find that pride and ego have prevented the people of the past from pursuing opportunities to seek peace, reconciliation, and healing of the spirit. We continue to be reminded through the scriptures that we are called to “Forgive Each Other.”

Introduction to the Opening Hymn:

Our opening hymn was written during a difficult time in our church history. President-prophet, Frederick M. Smith, was encouraging church members to accept his authoritarian style of church management. Many of the members, including his brother, Israel, felt this new style of management placed too much power in the First Presidency and limited the administrative role of other church leaders and members. Their opinions and views soon became personal conflicts and frustrations. The tension climaxed at a General Conference with members of the Bishopric and Council of Twelve walked out. Frederick M. Smith offered up his resignation if the church would not accept his style of leadership. It was a difficult time in the church.

However, one evening during the General Conference, F. M. Smith returned home and retired to his parlor. While listening to the radio, he heard the beautiful tune “Beautiful

Dreamer” by Stephen Foster. As he sat contemplating the future of the church, the words of the hymn “Onward to Zion,” were written that evening. The hymn seeks to find common ground among church members. It calls us to rise above our disagreements and frustrations to join arms and pursue building Zion. This historic hymn is President Smith optimistic expression of hope for the faith community he loved so much.

Decades later, a hymnal committee selected a new tune for President Smith’s hymn. The committee aimed for a tune that reflected our faith community’s ambitious goal of marching to Zion, rather than Foster’s slower tune that had the feel of a calming lullaby.

***Hymn: *Onward to Zion* CCS 390**

***Invocation**

***Response**

Scripture Reading: Luke 15: 11-31

Stories of Forgiveness from our Shared Heritage

Like Jesus’ story of the father forgiving his son, our church history is filled with powerful lessons of forgiveness and reconciliation. Nauvoo, Illinois, has been a place where we have experienced conflict, prejudice, and resentment. It has also been a place of reconciliation and healing of the spirit. Below are three stories that reflect forgiveness and reconciliation taking place in Nauvoo, Illinois. Invite three members of the congregation to share/read the stories below. A hymn is sung by the congregation between each story to create a shared theme and flow to the service.

First Story:

The home that Joseph Smith III grew up in also served as a hotel. Joseph’s mother, Emma, ran the hotel and in that role she once evicted one of the boarders. He became angry and returned with a gun, threatening Emma. Both Joseph and his step-father, Lewis Bidamon, were away from the home and unable to come to her aid. As a result of this encounter, Joseph developed a deep hatred for the man who had threatened his mother. He describes what happened next in his memoirs:

I may say that when I began to preach the gospel I soon found I could not conscientiously use the words of the Lord’s prayer – ‘and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us’ without a twinge of conscience. Whenever I repeated them or even read them or thought of them, this hatred, which I had nursed for so long in my heart against the man who had abused my mother, would come to mind and accuse me.

I finally saw that I must set myself to the task of overcoming this feeling, which I did humbly and earnestly. I am glad to say that, after a lapse of time, I was rewarded by the knowledge that the last vestige of my hate had disappeared and ill will was entirely banished.

The experience taught me a lesson. It forced upon my mind the necessity for many of the teachings of the Savior. I had a clearer understanding of what men were prone to feel of any unworthy nature . . . than I could have obtained had I not had this experience and learned to know what it was to hate a fellow-being. The knowledge helped to make me humble, and to exercise sympathy and charity for others struggling under like feelings . . . Hatred is a cruel, destructive, and unlovely thing, and wholly unbecoming a Christian.

Joseph Smith III’s story teaches us that forgiveness leads us one step closer to the Peace of Jesus Christ.

Congregation shares in 1st verse of *Forgive Our Sins as We Forgive*, CCS 215

Second Story:

Joseph Smith III, shortly after being ordained as our church president, felt torn from the community he had come to know and love in Nauvoo, Illinois. When word reached his neighbors and city officials that he had accepted a leadership position in a growing church, many responded with old feelings of anger based on their experience twenty years earlier when the church, under his father's leadership, held significant power over the political, social, and economic scene in Nauvoo during the 1840s. Out of the community's fear, Joseph III suffered from a surge of negative comments, public humiliation, and scorn from those whom he knew and respected. A group of Nauvoo citizens went to the extent of passing a resolution attempting to prevent Joseph from practicing his religion in the community. Joseph was deeply hurt. Years later, in his memoirs, he reflected on the pain he felt at the time:

"This feeling of prejudice against me because of my religion aroused my indignation. I was a pioneer of the county . . . No citizen could truthfully charge me with criminal conduct of any kind . . . And yet, to think that one so prominent as the mayor should oppose me and hold me up to public scorn, and that too, in articles to which he had not the decency to sign his own name!"

Rather than responding with vengeance, Joseph Smith III chose to disarm his opponents by continuing to be a caring friend, neighbor, and leader in his community. As a Justice of the Peace and School Director in Nauvoo, Joseph III showed his compassion for the immigrants of the community, upheld justice, and made decisions that were in the community's best interest, rather than his own. Over the years, his neighbors released their fears and embraced young Joseph for his integrity and compassion.

Seventeen years after being scorned by the public and at a time when the church was seeking a new place to build a community, Joseph Smith III received a petition signed by hundreds of Nauvoo residents asking him to sincerely consider making Nauvoo the new home of the Reorganization. Joseph reflected in his memoirs about his overwhelming feelings of gratitude as he responded to the invitation from those who had once rejected him:

"It is difficult for me now, after the years which have gone by since that day, to give an adequate expression of my feelings at the time . . . I found my spirit swept with a wave of strong exultation . . . I confess to shedding some tears as I spoke . . . trying to express my appreciation . . ."

From Joseph III experience, we learn that torn and tattered relationships can always be mended – through patience and forgiveness. May God continue to open our eyes to the torn world around us, so that we might weave a beautiful tapestry of community made possible through the peace of Christ.

Congregation shares in 2nd verse of *Forgive Our Sins as We Forgive*, CCS 215

Third Story:

Story from Steve Smith, Foundation field representative from Seattle, Washington, and current volunteer at the Joseph Smith Historic Site

During the 2010 World Conference, Jim Ellis and I were among the volunteers at the Joseph Smith Historic Site in Nauvoo, Illinois. We provided guide services while the regular staff was in Independence. I was thrilled to guide part of the Tahitian delegation. My great-uncle and great-aunt, Joseph and Emma Burton, had sailed the missionary boat, Evanelia, from San Francisco to Tahiti where they served as missionaries. My granddaughter is named after that boat.

We had a wonderful time guiding tours through Joseph and Emma Smith's homes and talking about the life of the church in Nauvoo. In the sanctuary on the second floor of the Red Brick Store we shared in worship, singing, and prayers. We exchanged Tahitian ritual greetings and

shell leis. It was a special, warm, and loving time.

But later that day misfortune struck. When the Tahitians went to a store, a stock boy became concerned about these different-looking people who spoke little English. He unjustly accused a Tahitian of shoplifting and called the police. Eventually it became clear the allegations were unfounded. The police and store representatives apologized. But feelings had been hurt, damaging what had been a wonderful experience.

Later, however, there was a beautiful outcome. Jim had been invited to dinner with a local family. He learned their daughter was on duty at the store the night the Tahitians visited. She went home very upset. After learning what had happened, the girl's mother and a friend baked a bunch of cookies and took them to the Tahitians' motel. They told the Tahitians how sorry they were about the false accusation and gave the cookies as a reconciliation offering. With many hugs, the Tahitians accepted the apology and cookies. In return they gave leis to the women.

But that wasn't all. The next morning the Tahitians returned to the store and presented leis to the staff. They sought the stock boy who had made the allegation and brought leis to him. They did not want him to lose his job over the incident.

Their actions were a wonderful testimony of the living reality of the gospel message among the Tahitian members of Community of Christ. They extended forgiveness and reconciliation. And they demonstrated the love and peace of Christ by reaching out to those who had offended them. As Christ said in John 13:35 (NRSV): "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Congregation shares in 3rd verse of *Forgive Our Sins as We Forgive*, CCS 215

Sharing Time ~ Focused on “Forgiving Each Other”

Invite members of the congregation to share their experience in either struggling to forgive someone or being on the receiving end of forgiveness. If large group testimonies are not the tradition in your congregation, consider dividing those in attendance into groups of 3-5. Reflect on the questions: “Like the early members of our church, when have you forgiven someone who was caused you pain?” or “What did it feel like to be on the receiving end of someone’s forgiveness”

Congregation shares in 4th verse of *Forgive Our Sins as We Forgive*, CCS 215

Prayer for Reconciliation and Healing of the Spirit

The period of sharing may have uprooted old emotions and negative of feelings for some in the congregation. Some may feel anxious and resentful towards those who have caused hurt and pain in their lives. In addition, the time of sharing may have caused feelings of guilt and sorrow among those who have caused injury and hurt feelings with another. It is important that we create space for prayer and reconciliation both spiritually and physically. Set aside a chair either in the four corners of the sanctuary or at the front of the sanctuary with priesthood members freely offering to give a special blessing or prayer for those who are hurting.

Hymn: *Gentle God, When We Are Driven*, CCS 222

Morning Message: Brief message or individual testimonies based on the theme “Forgive Each Other”

Disciples Generous Response:

Both individuals and the congregation is invited to designate all or a portion of an offering for the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation in an effort to help preserve and share church heritage for future generations. Donations may be sent to: Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation, P.O. Box 338, Nauvoo, IL 62354. If individual donors wish to receive a receipt acknowledging their tax-deductible donation, please indicate as such when submitting the donation.

A Heritage of Forgiveness:

W. W. Blair was an early missionary and member of the First Presidency. While Blair traveled on missionary assignments and for church conferences, he often relied on the generosity of church members to help him with travel expenses and providing for his family. In 1862, Blair and his family returned home from a church conference to discover their home had been broken into and the family robbed. Rather than responding with anger and resentment, W. W. Blair recorded in his memoirs his response to the robbers: "...if any were in such straits as to rob an unsalaried missionary and his family, they possibly needed what they obtained, even though they got it by crime, and so we 'let the dead bury their dead' and went about our Master's business."

The Lord has given us so much, let us pray that we too will have the patience and forgiveness, like W. W. Blair, to "go about our Master's business" despite the challenges that come our way.

Blessing and Receiving of Mission Tithes

***Closing Hymn: *O May Your Church Build Bridges*, CCS 224**

***Sending Forth/Benediction**

In the benediction and/or sending forth, incorporate the service emphasis of church heritage and the theme of "Forgive Each Other."

***Response**

Postlude