

World Conference Closing Sermon: Live, Love, Share...

Community of Christ, a divine vision is set before you...Lovingly invite others to experience the good news of new life in community with Christ...Undertake compassionate and just actions to abolish poverty and end needless suffering. Pursue peace on and for the Earth.

Let nothing separate you from this mission. It reveals divine intent for personal, societal, and environmental salvation; a fullness of gospel witness for creation's restoration.

—Doctrine and Covenants 165:1a–e

Can you see a future laboring to be born through those words? It is an alternative to many assumed trends.

Earlier the Conference approved words of counsel that describe God's vision for the church. Was our action routine? Or was it a prophetic community saying: "We see God's vision for us. We choose in faith to live with hope in that vision!"?

Seeing an alternative to presumed reality is spiritually transforming! Once we begin seeing it together, we can start living it together. And once we start living it together, a new future is born!

The purpose of vision is to rouse a new reality to life that challenges the accepted view of the way things are. An alternative vision, Walter Brueggemann wrote in *The Prophetic Imagination*, "serves to energize persons and communities by its promise of another [alternative] time and situation toward which the community of faith may move" (2nd Ed.).

In which direction are we moving in response to God's vision for us?

Clearly God sees a church that "Lovingly [invites] others to experience the good news of new life in community with Christ."

Do you know that more than a few "seekers" are at this Conference exploring Community of Christ as a possible spiritual home? Some will be coming to your congregation. Will they find hospitality, people willing to listen, and all the blessings of genuine community in Christ? Will the community we talk about be the community they experience?

God sees Community of Christ regularly celebrating baptisms and confirmations of new disciples eagerly involved in the church's fellowship and mission. Can you see that occurring in your congregation? The first step is to prayerfully picture it.

God also sees the church undertaking "compassionate and just actions to abolish poverty and end needless suffering."

The world is living a nightmare of pain and despair. God is calling for a massive exodus of people from poverty and related suffering. Who will be the prophets standing before crafty politicians and predatory hoarders of wealth, saying with conviction, "You had better let God's people go!"?

Can you see Community of Christ as that voice in the world? The poet writes: "Awaken your sleeping prophet, believe in your Moses, and go..." (Macrina Wiederkehr).

Also, according to the "divine vision...set before us" God sees a courageous faith community spending itself to "Pursue peace on and for the Earth."

Please note it is, "Pursue peace ON and FOR the Earth." Peace ON the Earth is about human-conflict resolution and post-conflict reconciliation. Peace FOR the Earth is about nursing the gaping wounds we have inflicted on Earth's land, water, life, and precious air.

God also sees a church that is generous like God is generous. Evidently God's view of true capacity is greater than our calculations.

The generosity called for is about stewardship as discipleship and spiritual growth. Generosity is spiritually liberating for those caught in excessive consumerism and self-indulgence. Each disciple's act of generosity is prophetic because it confronts a false vision of greed and material accumulation as the assumed way of the world. Generosity is spirituality in action, powered by grace, gratitude, and hope. Generosity is living the life of Jesus!

Also, since the time of Jesus and his first followers, God has called for the rise of communities of disciples that live in oneness and equality as a witness of the power of the gospel to reconcile and bring peace. As we go forth from this Conference focused on "One in Christ," we must resist the efforts of those trying to hijack the gospel and the church to promote their visions of intolerance, prejudice, and hate in the name of Christ.

All my life I have heard sermons, sung hymns, and listened to discussions about Zion. According to the vision before us, God sees a church that doesn't just speak and sing of Zion. God sees one that "live[s], love[s], and share[s] as Zion: those who strive to be visibly one in Christ, among whom there are no poor or oppressed" (Doctrine and Covenants 165:6a).

Can you see your congregation and the worldwide church living, loving, and sharing as Zion? What does that mean where you live?

I'll give you a hint! The only way there will be "no poor or oppressed" is for the rest of us to change our ways!

Zion is the divine vision that awakens our nobler natures and potential for sharing in community in the spirit of Christ. Zion is how Community of Christ practices hope in the world. Or, as said by Geoffrey F. Spencer in his book, *A Brightness of Hope*:

The vision of Zion, among other things, represents our conviction that the present is less than God's ultimate intention for human life, that the present is to be transformed and changed...The symbol of Zion does not present us with a blueprint; rather it prompts us to welcome the oncoming future instead of fearing it or wishing to withdraw from it.

The first experience of Continuing Revelation I had as prophet-president of the church began with these words:

"Community of Christ," your name, given as a divine blessing, is your identity and calling. If you will discern and embrace its full meaning, you will not only discover your future, you will become a blessing to the whole creation. Do not be afraid to go where it beckons you to go.

Jesus Christ, the embodiment of God's shalom, invites all people to come and receive divine peace in the midst of the difficult questions and struggles of life. Follow Christ in the way that leads to God's peace and discover the blessings of all of the dimensions of salvation.

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:1–2

The first paragraph of Section 163 tells us our future will be discovered as we let our name, Community of Christ, lead us there. It's like the lepers described in Luke 17:14. They became whole only as they "went" where Jesus told them. During their "going" they were blessed, not before. By going in faith and hope toward a promised future their lives were transformed.

Our name, Community of Christ, calls us to keep going. It is moving us toward a future God wants for us. That future involves being more and more like Jesus, who loved

indiscriminately, gave freely, forgave, and advocated for peaceful reconciliation instead of vengeful retribution. Our name urges us to be a faith community through which Christ's healing and salvation flow freely into a suffering world.

The English word *salvation* comes from the Latin word *salvus*. It means safe, healthy, sound, well, and whole. In some scriptures it is closely related to various forms of peace or shalom. Salvation and peace go together in God's universe.

Recently I was drawn to consider the sentence that concludes the second paragraph of Section 163: "Follow Christ in the way that leads to God's peace [shalom] and discover the blessings of all of the dimensions of salvation." The phrase "all of the dimensions of salvation" has intrigued me since Section 163 was introduced. What does that phrase mean for Community of Christ identity, message, and mission?

I was glad when the Holy Spirit prompted more to be said about that phrase. After stressing the importance of inviting others to Christ, abolishing poverty and ending needless suffering, and pursuing peace on and for the Earth as major elements of Christ's mission, the Holy Spirit confirmed it is all about God's big vision for salvation:

Let nothing separate you from this mission. It reveals divine intent for personal, societal, and environmental salvation; a fullness of gospel witness for creation's restoration.

—Doctrine and Covenants 165:1e

During a time when some types of Christianity preach increasingly narrow views of salvation using words of condemnation, Community of Christ is called to a broader vision of salvation. God's vision is holistic salvation for people, societies, and the Earth. Such salvation is not restricted to some ethereal future. It begins now for individuals, communities, and creation wherever God's vision is pursued. It is an astoundingly hopeful and holistic vision if we choose to see it!

As we leave World Conference we have two choices. We can surrender to those who would steal our hope to serve their desperate purposes. We can allow toxic visions that spawn cynicism, greed, suspicion, and violence to claim us. Or we can choose to live in the reconciling, healing, saving vision of God expressed through Christ-centered community. And we can invite others to live with us in that vision.

I pray as a result of all we have experienced this week that it is apparent Community of Christ is called to live in God's vision of hope, salvation, and peace regardless of any challenges or temporary setbacks we may face. This is a remarkably resilient church with a bright future if we allow God's vision for us to define our direction and priorities.

Go with God's blessing and Christ's peace until we meet again!