



“Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not. Behold the wounds which pierced my side, and also the prints of the nails in my hands and feet” (Doctrine and Covenants 6:36–37). The Prayer Book of Bonne of Luxembourg, Duchess of Normandy, fol. 328r, before 1349. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Cloisters Collection, 1969.



PART THREE

CONCLUSION



"I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). Door Post with Grapevine Emerging from a Chalice, sixth–seventh century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Rogers Fund, 1910.

COVENANTS AND THE TRUE VINE

We are all on a journey in life. Each day moves us forward in becoming more of the person we are choosing to become. This process is inevitable and relentless. For many people this can feel like a depressing downward slide, a “Long Day’s Journey into Night”¹ in which we find ourselves trapped by our weaknesses and those of others. Christ invites us to follow a different trajectory. He promised, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31–32). The greatest truth to know is the truth of Christ’s role as our Redeemer. He is the Father’s plan. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. The only way to find the freedom that he offers is to continue in his word, becoming his disciples and coming to know him as we experience the freedom of living his kind of life.

The redemption price that he offers is a gift. Through the ransom price of his atoning sacrifice, Christ is offering us a way to change course.

He is offering us a way to walk his covenant path, to come unto him by receiving his Atonement in ordinances and converted lives. God himself came down to atone for the sins of the world, but we decide if we want to give away our sins to know him. The great Jehovah gave himself to free us from the bondage of sin and our fallen state, but we decide if we are willing to make and keep the covenants that he offers us. Christ's Atonement is the ransom price, but redemption happens only when we receive that gift. We decide if we want to leave the prison.

The restoration of Christ's Church reestablished the only path back home. Knowing about the gospel isn't enough. We need to make and keep covenants to take upon ourselves the name of Christ and thereby to receive his nature. With the restoration of the priesthood, we can receive power with every covenant that we make and keep.

The ordinances present us with images and representations of his suffering and death. Taking time to slow down and reverently behold the sacrifice of the Lamb of God in these symbols, we realize that we are being offered tangible connections to Christ's redeeming love. Partaking of this gift can move us to humility and gratitude, giving us courage to continue along the covenant path. As we prioritize scripture study and participation in the ordinances, seeking to behold and respond to Christ's redeeming suffering and death, we can feel the love and grace that "so freely he offers [us]." As we see and respond to his mercy and love, we can "tremble to know that for me he was crucified, that for me a sinner he suffered and bled and died."² As we behold the wounds that pierced his side, and the prints of the nails in his hands and his feet, we can gain the faith and hope to enter into and stay on the only path forward, the only path home.

We cannot be where he is and stay where we are. We cannot become as he is and stay as we are. But the good news is that, thanks to Christ's ransom, the covenant path will take us there. Christ will take us there. That is the promise. That is *his* promise.

Understanding that the covenants are not a superpromise that we can never fulfill but, instead, a new relationship in which Christ becomes

our Kinsman-Redeemer can give us courage to stay on the covenant path. We won't make it on our own—we can't make it on our own. But we don't have to. That is why we have a Redeemer. His grace is sufficient. His power will continue to lift us and inspire us to keep making changes, to keep growing, to keep healing, to keep becoming more and more godly, but we must keep our covenants to keep that power in our lives.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ said, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow" (Matthew 6:28). It sounds effortless when he says "they toil not, neither do they spin," but I wonder if he might be using the growth of plants as a symbol, a way to understand the growth and life that the new and everlasting covenant offers. Our bondage lies in our hearts and minds. We do what we want, and so if we are not wanting what God wants, the problem is how to change what we want.

Christ offers us a radical solution—to connect ourselves to him through covenant and to receive him through the ordinances, and then let his power and Spirit change our desires. As we draw near unto him and receive his grace, our natures develop and change as surely as lilies do grow. Christ says, "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). I know of no better explanation for the power of the covenant path. Covenants are Christ's way of inviting us to connect to the source of life so that we can bring forth fruit and have his power in our lives—in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest. Consider the lilies of the field, consider the branches on the vine, how they grow, how they bring forth much fruit.

When we choose to connect ourselves to Christ through covenant we become free. We accept him as our Redeemer and he takes us on the journey from bondage. The irony of the covenant freedom that Christ offers is that this freedom is the strait and narrow path and that the bondage was our life of willfulness and living our way, what we thought was freedom. This covenant freedom brings us into closer and closer alignment with his will, just as he lived in perfect alignment with the Father's will. The freedom to bring forth much fruit and to be filled with the desire

to do good and be good flows from being connected to the True Vine. Christ offers us a covenant relationship so that we can experience a new kind of life, a life full of his Spirit. Resisting covenant requirements is resisting the very connection to Christ's life that will allow us to be as the lilies of the field and the branches on the grapevine. We can grow. We will grow. The lily doesn't toil or spin. The lily grows. The branch of the grapevine doesn't punch a time card—it brings forth much fruit.

Covenants are organic. They connect us to Christ. He is the light and the life of the world. He wants us to have his light and his power, now and throughout all eternity. He stands waiting to give us this light and power, to infuse our lives with new desires and loving feelings. The gift of the Holy Ghost is the most precious gift that Christ's Atonement makes possible in this life. The covenants and ordinances are our lifeline. Making and keeping covenants helps us tap into the source of life, today and forever. Participating in the ordinances allows us to behold and receive the atoning death that is the source of our eternal life. Through the covenants and ordinances, Christ allows us to come to know him as we receive his name, his nature.

I experienced this myself when I was nearing my twentieth birthday. It was a Sunday afternoon in fall, and the semester was not going well. My life was not going well. Something inside me offered a prayer for help, and then I lay down on my dorm room bed and took a nap. When I awoke, a phrase from the last general conference came into my mind. President Ezra Taft Benson had promised that when you put God first, everything will fall into place or fall out of your life. That thought was a seed that I had to decide whether to cultivate or not. Maybe I felt I had nothing to lose. Maybe I was just desperate enough to try anything. But something inside me trusted that this was real, that this would work. So I started.

I started right then thinking about what it meant to put God first in my life. I knew it meant I needed to do the things that I knew I should be doing but wasn't. I knew that I should pray, not only before I went to sleep but also in the morning. So I changed that. I knew that I should

attend my Sunday School class and not wander around and talk with my hallmates. So I changed that. I knew that President Benson was teaching that we should read the Book of Mormon every day. I did read my scriptures every day, but not the Book of Mormon. So I changed that.

Putting the Lord first was exercising my faith unto repentance. Putting the Lord first was choosing to keep my covenants. As I started making these choices, I started feeling and recognizing promptings from the Holy Ghost in a way that I never had before. As I started reading the Book of Mormon and listening to the promptings of the Spirit, I realized that I needed to choose to receive the gift that had been promised me in my confirmation many years before. As I more actively sought to receive the Holy Ghost, I started getting impressions about other things I needed to change. Step by step, I moved forward on the journey out of bondage and into the freedom of discipleship. I began that journey over thirty years ago, and I have been on it ever since.

I know that Christ is our Redeemer because I know that he is my Redeemer. Like the man born blind, I can say, "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see" (John 9:25). I know that making and keeping our covenants is the journey of receiving the blessings of Christ's atoning sacrifice. The ordinances point the way and mark the path of how to receive his nature, the divine nature. As we come unto him on that journey, we come to know for ourselves that he is come that we might have life and that we might have it more abundantly.

I know for myself that if we look we will live. I know that as we believe on his name we will repent of all our sins. This is the covenant path. I know that as we come unto Christ we can be perfected in him. This is the journey of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ: covenanting to take his name upon us, becoming the children of the covenant, and then moving forward to live lives of worship, bowing down and serving him with lives of obedience and sacrifice. As we press forward, our outward service gradually becomes inward sanctification; we increasingly seek for the holiness of his presence and deny ourselves of all ungodliness.

Through the Restoration, the power of godliness is made available through the ordinances of salvation. Christ manifests his ransom price to us through the immersion of baptism and the emblems of the sacrament. He invites us to participate, to partake. As we slow down to behold, we likewise see in the symbols of the endowment and sealing Christ's gift of life. He invites us to fully take his name and nature upon us, to respond to the gift of his sacrifice with our lives of sacrifice and consecration. We can move forward with hope. We can move forward with humility, knowing that we are saved only in and through his atoning blood. He is the vine, and we are the branches.

We can move forward and grow upward, gradually becoming partakers of his divine nature through the "great and precious promises" of our covenant relationship (see 2 Peter 1:3–4). We can doubt not and fear not as we behold his wounds and trust in his redeeming blood. "His way is the path that leads to happiness in this life and eternal life in the world to come. God be thanked for the matchless gift of His divine Son."³ Because of the Father's plan of redemption and Christ's gift of his life, we can receive life. We can be connected to the True Vine and have that life flowing through us now and forever.

NOTES

1. Title of a play by Eugene O'Neill.
2. Charles H. Gabriel, "I Stand All Amazed," in *Hymns* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 193.
3. "The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles," *Ensign*, April 2000, 2.