

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland



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ord Alton, thank you for that definitive statement. It was good fortune beyond the alphabet that had you lead off with that message. I'm grateful to Andrew Teal, my distinguished colleagues, and all of you for the invitation to be here. I'm a token on this program for more reasons than one: I'm the token Yank from across the pond, and in a sense I'm the token representative of an institution that has not only given service but also received service and survived through the service, compassion, and charity of others.

We in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have the questionable distinction of being the only church in the history of the United States of America to have an extermination order issued against it. That was a century and a half ago, but we have not forgotten that, and we've been very grateful to those who were willing, kind, compassionate—interested and responsible enough—to have helped us then. We've since spent a century and a half trying to do our best at helping others. So thank you for letting me represent a rather unique view from among those on our panel here; I certainly look forward to Lord Williams's and Reverend Young's messages to come.

The Character of the Giver

An act of service will not necessarily define the life or reveal the character of the recipient. It might, but it wouldn't necessarily do so. But I do believe that it will almost always define the life and reveal the character of the giver, and it's against that context that I wish to talk a little bit about the New Testament context for the kind of service that Lord Alton so brilliantly described here in a contemporary way.

In what would probably be the most startling moment of His early ministry, Jesus stood up in His home synagogue in Nazareth and read these words prophesied by Isaiah and recorded in the Gospel of Luke: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, . . . to set at liberty them that are bruised" (Luke 4:18). Thus, the Savior made the first public announcement of His messianic ministry. But this verse also made clear that on the way to His ultimate atoning sacrifice and Resurrection, Jesus's first and foremost messianic duty would be to bless others, "succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees" (Doctrine and Covenants 81:5). James called such care for others "the royal law" (James 2:8)—his synonymous title of the second great commandment. Paul wrote to the Galatians that "all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Galatians 5:14). Christ's ministry and His teachings leave no room to doubt the seriousness with which we must embrace this sacred instruction—to inspire service and to serve inspiringly. Certainly, He so served and so inspired.

In the process of teaching this principle, He gave what is arguably the most renowned and oft quoted parable in the New Testament canon. When asked, "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29), Jesus told the story the whole Western world has come to know-that of a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho who fell among thieves and was wounded, robbed, and left at the wayside to die. A priest and a Levite came by and looked on him and passed by on the other side. Into this scene then came a Samaritan, a man to whose people and cities the Twelve had been forbidden to go. This otherwise unworthy man stopped and gave immediate aid to the troubled one, then arranged for his continuing care at a nearby inn. To his inquirer, Jesus then asked, "Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that showed mercy unto him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go and do thou likewise" (Luke 10:36-37).

Inspiring service—it would be difficult not to see the vital role such care for others plays in the very fundamentals of Christian faith. Jesus, in His life and teachings, made it clear that caring for others was not an option. Indeed, He declared that without it one could not qualify for the greatest of eternal blessings—eternal life. The scriptures consistently teach that acts of Christian service are expressions of Christian love.

Adversity is all around us. It's all about us; it's among us on every side, or so it seems. Some of it is man-made. Some of it comes from natural forces, but whatever the source, adversity and trial are inevitable elements of mortality, and ultimately all of us have some confrontation with it. But our religion, centering on the life and mission of the Lord Jesus Christ, helps us comprehend that. We comprehend that God and Christ love us with a mature, perfect love. Furthermore, in an effort to counter earthly ills that strike us, they call the members of our earthly family to be instruments of their love and "doers of the word" (James 1:22). So we have the great honor to be invited to be these instruments for inspiring service. We need God, but He also needs us. It's an inspiring thought to think that not only humankind but divinity itself needs our heart and needs our helping hand. Surely that must be one way that we are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ (see Romans 8:17).

Quiet, Unheralded Service

Another thought that makes such service inspiring is that it's often done in demonstrated obscurity—in quiet rooms, in homes and hospitals and places of confinement, in prisons and refugee camps and residential centers for the elderly—many, many places far from the public eye. Usually it's unheralded, but ironically, it reflects the very public standard set by the Savior for those who will inherit the kingdom

prepared from the foundation of the world. These are they who serve the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the homeless, and those who are sick, or in prison, or in pain. They do all of this after the pattern and in the spirit of Him who said "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40). Conversely, to those who fail to minister to the needy, He said, "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me" (Matthew 25:45).

May I refer to a first century BC incident in the New World, recorded in our Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ? There the prophet Alma urged his congregation to cry to the Lord over all their activities and all their possessions, all their flocks and all their fields, and for the general welfare of themselves and those about them (see Alma 34:17-27). Their whole attitude was to be one of prayerful gratitude to the Lord for all that they had been given and all that they were blessed with. Then Alma said rather sternly, "Do not suppose that this is all; for after ye have done all these things"-that is, been prayerfully thankful for all that we have been given-"if ye turn away the needy, and the naked, and visit not the sick and afflicted, and impart of your substance, if ye have, to those who stand in need-I say unto you, if ye do not any of these things, behold, your prayer is vain, and availeth you nothing, and ye are as hypocrites who deny the faith" (Alma 34:28).

The Impact of One Person

Given the monumental challenge of addressing immense need in the world, what can one man or one woman do? The Master Himself offered an answer. When before His betrayal and crucifixion Mary anointed Jesus's head with an expensive burial ointment, Judas Iscariot protested this extravagance and murmured against her. Jesus said, "Why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work.... She hath done what she could" (Mark 14:6, 8). "She hath done what she could"—what a succinct formula!

A journalist once questioned Mother Teresa about her hopeless task of rescuing the destitute of Calcutta. He said that, statistically speaking, she was accomplishing absolutely nothing. This remarkable little woman shot back that her work was not about statistics-it was about love. Notwithstanding the staggering number beyond her reach, she said she could keep the commandment to love God and her neighbor by serving those who were within her reach with whatever resources she had. "What we do is nothing but a drop in the ocean," she would say on another occasion, "but if we didn't do it, the ocean would be one drop less than it is."1 Soberly, the journalist concluded that Christianity is obviously not a statistical endeavor. He reasoned that if there would be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over the ninety and nine who need no repentance, then apparently God is not overly preoccupied with percentages either.² In poetic form, we're hard-pressed to improve on the prayer often attributed to Saint Ignatius Loyola: "To give and not to count the cost, to fight and not

to heed the wounds, . . . to labour and not to look for any reward, save that of knowing that I do your holy will."³

Jesus did not just speak about love; He showed it virtually every hour of His life. He did not take Himself away from the crowd, at least not permanently. He constantly returned to the people, even after His prayer, looking for the child, the publican, the suffering woman, the anguished man who needed Him. He didn't just teach a Sabbath class about reaching out in love and then delegate the actual work to those in the audience. No, it was always "Come . . . follow me" (Matthew 19:21). Come, do as I do. "Take up [your] cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life [in keeping the royal law] will find it" (Matthew 16:24–25).

One of the New Testament teachings that inspires service in me are these lines from Matthew 9: "But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, the harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send laborers into the harvest" (Matthew 9:36–38).

The fact of the matter is true love requires action. We can speak of love all day long, we can write notes and sonnets that proclaim it, we can sing lyrics that praise it, and we can preach sermons that encourage it, but until we manifest that love in action our words are nothing. No, they are actually something: "sounding brass" and "a tinkling cymbal" (1 Corinthians 13:1). "Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there shall be knowledge, it shall vanish away" (1 Corinthians 13:8). We have the message of the New Testament and the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ to encourage our pursuit of inspiring service. May we do so even more successfully as a result of tonight's conversation.

Notes

- Mother Teresa of Calcutta, My Life for the Poor, ed. José Luis González-Balado and Janet N. Playfoot (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 20.
- 2. See Malcolm Muggeridge, *Something Beautiful for God: Mother Teresa* of *Calcutta* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 28–29, 118–19.
- Jack Mahoney, SJ, "A Mysterious Ignatian Prayer," *Thinking Faith*, blog, 17 February 2012, thinkingfaith.org/articles/20120217_1.htm; see also J. Munitiz, SJ, "A Pseudo-Ignatian Prayer," *Letters and Notices* 97, no. 426 (Autumn 2004): 12–14.