

TREASURE IN EARTHEN VESSELS



A COUPLE OF WEEKS AGO, I was invited to sustain a new bishop—a longtime neighbor and home teacher. Tomorrow we will be privileged to sustain the General Authorities of the Church. When I engage in this time-honored practice of sustaining Church officers, whether a bishop or the Brethren, I often recall a scripture from 2 Corinthians, “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us” (2 Corinthians 4:7).

“Treasures in earthen vessels.” This image suggests what the Lord’s servants have always acknowledged—namely that they are mortals like the rest of us, with normal human flaws and limitations. As King Benjamin said to his people when he gathered them for the equivalent of an ancient general conference, “I have not commanded you to come up hither ... that ye should think that I of myself am more than a mortal man. But I am like as yourselves, subject to all manner of infirmities in body and mind” (Mosiah 2:10–11).

We do not worship or idolize our leaders. We sustain them, which means “hold up.” We are instructed to uphold them with our “confidence, faith, and prayer” (D&C 107:22) “in their weakness” (D&C 1:24). As I raise my arm to the square, I sometimes think of Aaron and Hur holding up Moses’ arms during the battle (Exodus 17:12).

At the same time, these earthen vessels are the oracles of God for us. The Lord proclaims his gospel by “the weak and the

simple” (D&C 1:23). He entrusts this treasure to earthen vessels, “that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.”

This principle of earthen vessels reminds me of a story from the life of Karl G. Maeser recounted many years ago at BYU by President Boyd K. Packer. As one who likes to hike, I have often recounted this story to my family when we have made our way across a mountain track, guided only by cairns.

On one occasion he [Karl G. Maeser] was leading a party of young missionaries across the Alps. As they slowly ascended the steep slope, he looked back and saw a row of sticks thrust into the glacial snow to mark the one safe path across the otherwise treacherous mountains.

Something about those sticks impressed him, and halting the company of missionaries he gestured toward them and said, “Brethren, there stands the priesthood. They are just common sticks like the rest of us—some of them may even seem to be a little crooked, but the position they hold makes them what they are. If we step aside from the path they mark, we are lost.”²⁶

The Brethren are not the only earthen vessels through whom we receive the treasures of heaven. This Easter weekend we remember the treasure we have received from one who chose to “dwell in a tabernacle of clay,” that he might “suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death” (Mosiah 3:5, 7). Many in Jesus’ own day dismissed him as a mere man. After all, they knew his brothers and sisters. They knew his carpenter father and his inconsequential hometown of Nazareth. He was easy to dismiss. For, as Isaiah predicted, Jesus “hath no form nor comeliness; ... there is no beauty that we should desire him”; hence he was “despised and rejected of men” (Isaiah 53:2–3).

Yet through this lowly, humble, earthen vessel, the world received an inestimable treasure. How blessed we are that the

Savior condescended to take “upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:7–8). This weekend I am grateful to sustain, and be sustained by, the many treasures God has given us in earthen vessels.