

Baskets and Bottles

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My dear brothers and sisters, aloha! In February, I rejoiced with you when the number of members outside the United States edged ever so slightly past the number of members inside the United States. That slight shift is an important symbol of the international nature of the Church. I thought of Paul's statement to the Galatians: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). This week I celebrate the 54th anniversary of my baptism. People like me who are converts know the promise of Paul: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13).

Brothers and sisters, today I want to talk about the beautiful oneness that we share in the gospel. I just returned from the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, Tonga, and Fiji three weeks ago, where Sister Susan Warner and I participated in leadership training. Earlier assignments have taken me to Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, Samoa, Korea, and Japan.

In all these places we worked hard and long. People have said, "Oh, you must have been so tired." On the contrary, there was a feeling of being borne up "as on eagles' wings" (D&C 124:18), because we have seen the daughters of Zion "awake, and arise ... and put on [their] beautiful garments" (Moro. 10:31) in response to the good news of the gospel. We taught but—and this is the point I want to stress—we also learned.

The most important lesson was that we are truly all one in Christ Jesus. We are one in our love of the Savior. We are one in our testimonies of the gospel. We are one in faith, hope, and charity. We are one in our conviction that the Book of Mormon is the inspired word of God. We are one in supporting President Hinckley and the other General Authorities. We are one in loving each other.

Are we perfect in any of these things? No. We all have much to learn. Are we exactly the same in any of these things? No. We are all at different points on our journey back to our Father in Heaven. Did the Jews and Greeks whom Paul addressed in his epistle to the Galatians stop being Jews and Greeks when they were baptized? Did the men stop being men and the women stop being women? No. But they had all "been baptized into Christ" and had "put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27).

Nephi explains the same principle in these terms: [The Savior] "inviteth ... all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female ... and all are alike unto God" (2 Ne. 26:33).

God has given us many gifts, much diversity, and many differences, but the essential thing is what we know about each other—that we are all his children. Our challenge as members of the Church is for all of us to learn from each other, that we may all love each other and grow together.

The doctrines of the gospel are indispensable. They are essential, but the packaging is optional. Let me share a simple example to show the difference between the doctrines of the Church and the cultural packaging. Here is a bottle of Utah peaches, prepared by a Utah homemaker to feed her family during a snowy season. Hawaiian homemakers don't bottle fruit. They pick enough fruit for a few days and store it in baskets like this for their families. This basket contains a mango, bananas, a pineapple, and a papaya. I bought these fruits in a supermarket in Salt Lake City, but they might have been picked by a Polynesian homemaker to feed her family in a climate where fruit ripens all year round.

The basket and the bottle are different containers, but the content is the same: fruit for a family. Is the bottle right and the basket wrong? No, they are both right. They are containers appropriate to the culture and the needs of the people. And they are both appropriate for the content they carry, which is the fruit.

Now, what is the fruit? Paul tells us: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, [and] temperance" (Gal. 5:22–23). In the sisterhood of Relief Society, in the brotherhood of priesthood quorums, in the reverent coming together to partake of the sacrament, the fruit of the Spirit unites us in love, joy, and peace whether the Relief Society is in Taipei or Tonga, whether the priesthood quorum is in Montana or Mexico, and whether the sacrament meeting is in Fiji or the Philippines.

All over the world, as brothers and sisters in the gospel, we can learn from each other, grow closer together, and increase in love for each other. Our unity grows from what we have in common all around the world. They are the doctrines and ordinances of the gospel, our faith in the Savior, our testimonies of the scriptures, our gratitude for guidance from living prophets, and our sense of ourselves as a people striving to be Saints. These are the principles of the gospel.

Let us be sensitive to the unchanging and powerful core principles of the gospel. Let us understand that they matter most. Let us build firm foundations on these principles. Then when the rains fall and the floods come, our house will be "founded upon a rock" and it will not fall (Matt. 7:25).

Then, building on that firm foundation, let us rejoice with each other, listen to each other, learn from each other, and help each other apply those principles as we deal with our different circumstances, different cultures, different generations, and different geographies.

For six years now, I have been listening to the Relief Society women of the Church. I have learned from all of them. I have learned from divorced mothers who are struggling to raise their children alone. I have learned from women who long to be

married but are not, from women who yearn for children but cannot bear them, from women who are at risk from emotional and physical abuse in their homes. I have learned from women who work in their homes and women who work outside their homes. I have learned from women who endure chemical dependencies, experiences of childhood sexual abuse, and chronic illness.

Not many of these women thought they were giving me a gift. Most of them thought they were asking for help. But all of them blessed me as I listened and learned from them.

When I was called to the Relief Society general presidency six years ago this month, President Hinckley counseled me: "You bring a peculiar quality to this presidency. You will be recognized as one who represents those beyond the borders of the United States and Canada and, as it were, an outreach across the world to members of the Church in many, many lands. They will see in you a representation of their oneness with the Church." He gave me a blessing that my tongue might be loosed as I spoke to the people.

President Hinckley, I want to bear witness to the Lord before you and this congregation that your counsel and your blessing have been literally fulfilled.

I do not speak Korean or Spanish or Tongan. But when I received my assignment to go among the Relief Society sisters and their priesthood leaders in lands where those languages were spoken, I was filled with a great desire to speak to them in their own language. I drew strength from President Hinckley's words of comfort and blessing. With the help of the Church Translation Department and good coaches who spent hours working with me, I was blessed to deliver my addresses in Spanish, Korean, and Tongan as I went among those people. I could feel the Spirit carrying my words to their hearts, and I could feel "the fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22) bringing back to me their love, their joy, and their faith. I could feel the Spirit making us one.

Brothers and sisters, whether your fruits are peaches or papaya, and whether you bring them in bottles or in baskets, we thank you for offering them in love. Father in Heaven, may we be one and may we be thine (see D&C 38:27), I pray in the sacred name of our Savior Jesus Christ, amen.