

Building Community towards Peace

| LOVE |

From a sermon given by Ben Smith, Australia Mission President at the Communion Service at Tiona Reunion 2019

Her small hand reaches, balancing on new feet, with trepidation, not really knowing what they do, she strives for it with the exuberance of a giraffe reaching for the highest supple leaf. Crash, she falls back onto the hard timber floor, only to roll forward to rise once again, eager for her goal. Up she steps again, eyes peering over the top of the chair to see treasure and trove, she seeks, all the while making judgements as to how long her arm is and how long she can balance herself to reach it. Her arm stretches out again, straining and shaking, she grabs the remote and drags it back to the floor, smiling from ear to ear having accomplished her task, pressing its buttons and hearing its clicks, joy overcomes and she looks at me, eyes beaming, she did it.

As Pippa learns new things, like how interesting remote controls can be, I'm struck with her perseverance. It seems we're born with it, we're born with a natural searching, a foundational characteristic to yearn and to learn, it's innate. Whether its searching for meaning, improvement, higher heights or just the last piece of cake, we're hard wired to reach what once seemed impossible. But sometimes we fail, crashing down to earth with a mighty thud. It's there where darkness sometimes creeps upon us.

A few years ago I shared a story at Tiona Reunion about Lana and I not being able to have our own children. Nearly a decade of attempting through various avenues to grow our family we were left with pain, emptiness, shame, questioning life's purpose and a very depleted bank account.

For so many years we sat in our darkness, not acknowledging it, not speaking of it publicly, not sharing our struggles with anyone. But it was whispering to us. In the darkness, it was whispering lessons for life. Lessons we needed to embrace, to listen to and to share. It wasn't until a while later that we realized our story could make us stronger and that's when we began to open up and share it with the world around us. Opening up to our pain, becoming vulnerable, allowed us to open up to healing. Others came forward with their stories, their spirits weaving with ours, creating a tapestry for a community which built a safe space to reflect on the light and the dark in our lives.

Fast forward to last year, large shifts had occurred in our life and I shared a story of anticipation of the birth of our daughter, Pippa. What joy was to come as

we shared with our family to bring forth life into the world. And what a light she has become. Yet, we have glimpsed only a whisper of her light. I cannot imagine the fullness of her thunder.

These contrasting stories are not unique to just me. They are a familiar pattern for many of us of dark, light, dark, light and the rollercoaster of life is experienced by all of us in so many ways. What have yours been? Relationships breaking down? University graduations? Financial struggles? Magical holiday experiences? Health battles? Sometimes it feels like there is no way out of the dark, that nothing is there but pain and suffering, yet we know that there are always whispers of grace and learning in that place.

Job's life was complicated. In his discourse with many humble servants, his cries out to God are fierce pleas for release from his pain and suffering. His pleadings are not unlike those who have gone through troubled times.

He says in one of his encounters, unable to grasp the reaches of God, and overwhelmed with the realization that God is with him:

"How you have helped one who has no power!

How you have assisted the arm that has no strength!

How you have counseled one who has no wisdom, and given much good advice!

With whose help have you uttered words, and whose spirit has come from you?"



unity ful Humanity

Bildad continues

*The shades below tremble,
the waters and their inhabitants.*

*He stretches out wisdom over the void,
and hangs the earth upon nothing.*

*He binds up the waters in his thick clouds,
and the cloud is not torn open by them.*

*He covers the face of the full moon,
and spreads over it his cloud.*

*He has described a circle on the face of the waters,
at the boundary between light and darkness.*

*The pillars of heaven tremble,
and are astounded at his rebuke.*

By his power he stilled the Sea;

by his understanding he struck down Rahab.

By his wind the heavens were made fair;

his hand pierced the fleeing serpent.

These are indeed but the outskirts of his ways;

and how small a whisper do we hear of him!

But the thunder of his power who can understand?"

(Job 26)

We have no idea the depths in which the Spirit can go. Into the darkness, into the light, all of which is permeated by the Spirit's voice, we simply cannot comprehend with our minds how God can be with us always, and yet, God is.

I've been struck countless times this week with a sense of the greatest humility. At sunset reflections a few nights ago it was confirmed to me that the Spirit is indeed among these people, that we are on the path towards becoming a peaceful humanity and we will lead the world into the fullness of shalom. My own spirit though is often troubled with a sense of inadequacy, of being overwhelmed with the greatness of the task ahead of us, and whether I am the one to lead. I regularly feel a sense of guilt that I don't have the answers or the solution to many of our struggles, and sometimes the questions are even unclear. But, I have learned not to dwell in this place. I'm reminded and comforted by our ancestors' stories, those such as Job or Joseph that God walks with us, indeed, God walks with you, and God walks with me.

The words of the Spirit fill my soul when we hear in Doctrine and Covenants 164 that

‘The challenges and opportunities are momentous. Will you remain hesitant in the shadows of your fears, insecurities, and competing loyalties? Or will you move forward in the light of your divinely instilled call and vision?’

We’re promised a rocky path, but when we move forward in the light of our divinely instilled call and vision, the path toward Zion, the peaceful humanity we all desire, we will be blessed. So with that I am reassured. Reassured that I’m in the right place, that I am with my people, that we may see a way through our dark times or times of insecurity and continue our work of creating a world filled with peace and justice. Together, we will walk out of the shadows.

The Lord’s Supper is a story of light and darkness as we reach out tonight, straining and shaking to receive these symbols of commitment. A symbol beginning in sadness, soon becomes a commitment to bringing light to the world. Our role as disciples is not to sit idle waiting for the world to change itself, we must move! As we reach out tonight, straining and shaking, to receive these symbols of commitment, we’re called to move forward! Not to remain the same, not to be complacent, not to drop the anchor and hope the world fixes itself, but to use the call and vision we’ve always had, the same one my parents and grandparents had been given, those who have gone before us, to build a peaceful humanity. To bring forth the kingdom of peace. To abolish poverty and end needless suffering. Our role as disciples is to be the representation, the incarnation of Jesus Christ in our world, and as a people, I am more convinced than ever that we have what it takes to change the world.

May we never stop searching for the light in our life. May the perseverance and persistence deep within us continue to provide the energy we need to pursue peace and justice for all creation. A peaceful humanity is not impossible. Let us extend ourselves, let us fall, and let us stand tall again as we are led by the Spirit, is my prayer, Amen.



