

HONORING CHRIST

It is heartwarming to hear Max's comments, and more so to have watched him get to this point today. When he was a little boy, he would bear the most profound and insightful testimony on a regular basis. He stopped doing that many years ago, and I have watched and waited for him to get back in touch with that part of himself. I testify to Max and to you, that service is one of the best ways to heal and learn and be influenced by the spirit. So I anticipate a lot of that for Max as he serves the Lord and his fellow man as a missionary in Russia. I reflected this morning on all that brought us here to this moment today. It was overwhelming. My baby is flying the coop in the best way I can think. It does my mother's heart a great deal of good.

My topic today is Honoring Christ. This is the perfect time of year to discuss this as we celebrate his birth.

I looked up the word honor at Dictionary.com and got three pages of definitions. I will boil it down to the word respect - great respect born of love.

The first thing that came to my mind when I thought of the word Honor was from the Ten Commandments - when Moses went up into the mountain as he was leading the children of Israel out of Egypt and back to the Holy Land - the first four commandments regard worshiping God

- Thou shalt have no other gods before me
- Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image
- Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain
- Thou shalt remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy

And then the fifth commandment - I have to think it comes next in importance -

- Honour thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

That comes before Thou shalt not kill. Hmmmmmm.

I was not raised to honor my parents. I have the church to thank for that from my earliest contact with the missionaries on.

When my older son Bill went on his mission to California, Max was living with his father in Washington - so when I got back from delivering Bill to the MTC, I entered our apartment and the emptiness was palpable. It felt like a morgue. That evening, I downloaded the family history software from the church's family history website and began entering my family records into it on my computer. I threw myself into family history to fill the void I felt with the absence of my sons. The software program allows you to print out records and reports and charts - I printed out a pedigree chart that went back 12 generations. If you have seen a pedigree chart, it looks kind of like a tree on it's side. It lists the name, place and date of birth, marriage and death of you, and then your parents, and their parents and on and on for 12 generations. I took the pages and assembled them on my wall. It wouldn't fit. Since my mother's side of the family came from

Russia, we had very little information, and only went back to my great grandparents. So I really only posted on my wall my father's ancestors. It went from floor to ceiling and was 10 feet wide. I looked at those names and thought to myself, "what if even one of these people, any one of them, had not done what they did? What if they had not married who they married and had the children they had?" I realized that if any one of them had not done just what they did, I would not be me - I might not have been born at all. And it made me so grateful to each and every one of them.

But not only did my ancestors provide DNA for me, I know that each one of them provided a home, food, clothing, a good example and often religious training to their children. I know my parents provided me with more than I can begin to appreciate. I know they made great sacrifices for me. My dad could have boosted his career by accepting offers in distant cities that were much more prestigious and lucrative than the one he had. But he didn't want to disrupt his family and move them again. That is just one small thing. My mother gave up a career as a chemist to have a family. Do they deserve my honor? Yes.

How do we honor parents? How do parents want to be honored? Would it be gratifying if children would stand every time parents entered the room and always said "yes ma'am" or "yes sir?" Would that be enough? Would it make parents happy? It is respectful enough, but I think not as important as many other things. What would a parent want children to do to honor them? I think they would want children to

- take care of the things they provided for them - their home, clothes, toys, books, education and other opportunities.
- I think they would like to be appreciated and thanked.
- I think they would like to be listened to,
- and then to see that their children were living the way they taught them to live and have happy productive lives.
- I think they would want children to come to them with their joys and sorrows and share with them their dreams and struggles.
- I think they would appreciate being sought after for advice and support.
- In their old age, I think they would like to be taken care of, served if the need arose.

What do you think, parents? Is that what you want? Is that how you wish to be honored?

So, what about Christ? We get so much from our parents, and we are commanded to honor them, and rightfully so. What do we get from Christ, and why should we honor him?

I will read Paul's epistle to the Colossians, first chapter, verses 12-22

12 Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:

13 Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:

14 In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:

15 Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:

16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:

17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

18 And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

19 For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell;

20 And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.

21 And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled

22 In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight:

WOW! That talks about so much - what Jesus Christ provided for us. Let's break it down.

He created everything! The heavens and the earth.

I will concentrate just now on the earth. I think about it's placement in the universe, in the galaxy and in the solar system - it is perfectly placed. It's orbit around the sun is perfectly set. It is perfectly tipped on it's axis. It's size and shape is perfect. The size of the moon and the distance from the earth and the path of it's orbit - is perfect. The ratio of water to land is perfect. The placement of oceans and land are perfect that nearly the entire planet is habitable. The elements it is made of and that exist in perfect balance in land, sea and air to perfectly sustain life. The perfect balance of plant life and animal life - and not only all of that - but it is all done with such artistry and beauty. We have a visual feast, we hear marvelous sounds in nature, we eat delightful food, and smell wonderful aromas - and man is the crowning creation. Actually, Eve was the final crowning creation - so we will just leave you to think about what that means. There is a miracle in our bodies, they are magnificent and we are patterned after the image of our Father so of course, we are magnificent.

I stand in awe of it all. By the power, or priesthood, of Jesus Christ were all these things created. So not a moment of our very life on this planet can we not attribute to Jesus Christ. I'd say that is a good reason to honor him.

But that is not all! Not only did he provide wonderfully for us, but he sacrificed everything for us.

Why? Why was this world created? Father in Heaven loved us and we wanted to be like him. We needed a physical place to come and get our physical bodies and learn and grow so we could become like him and return to be with him again and be as he is. Just as a child wants to grow up to be like a loving parent.

Thus the perfect place for us was created. Just one thing however. We were taught much, but once here, we forgot it all, yet we are practicing our skills. And just like taking driver's ed when we are 15 so we can get our driver's license when we are 16 - we are taught, but most of all, we must practice - and practice and practice to learn and practice the difficult skill of driving a car. There is so much to keep track of. Even after getting a license. When I got my driver's license, the first day my mother let me drive her car to school, I was thrilled. On the way home, I got into my neighborhood and saw the boy who lived across the street walking home - he must have been let off by the activity bus at the entrance of our subdivision, and I got it in my head to offer him a ride so I could show off that I now had my license. But my books were all over the passenger seat. So I leaned over to move them, and next thing I knew, I felt a bump bump bump - and I looked up and was no longer on the road and stopped just shy of a large tree in a neighbor's yard. I had taken the steering wheel with me as I leaned over - what a shock! I had run over someone's mailbox. Several people came running out of their houses - so much for showing off! My best friend who was a couple months younger than I drove by with her mother and saw me and our car in the middle of someone's yard and all these people standing around. I thought I was so cool for getting my license before she got hers. Now I wished I could run and hide before she saw me. And I had to go home and face my mother. It was dreadful. She surprised me by not going ballistic, but she made me pay for the decimated mailbox.

Training and practice is the only way to learn. And that is what we are doing here on earth. The problem is, as soon as we make the slightest mistake - we can never return to our Father in Heaven. Because where he is, everything has to be perfect - not the slightest stain or imperfection can be tolerated. This is a great dilemma.

That's where Christ comes in once again, to provide a way to erase our mistakes, to cleanse our stains to perfection again. He came to earth himself and lived a perfect life - not only free of mistakes, but full of light and goodness and truth and wisdom. And so he qualified to pay our debts.

Last week I attended tithing settlement. I am self employed and that means I have to keep my own records - not only of my income, but also of my expenses. I hate record keeping, and it had been six months since I had updated my records. I wanted to know if I owed tithing or not. I had to go through my online bank records to find all my business expenses. It was a real eye opener. I don't have a separate business account and so as I looked at each expenditure - it was like reliving my life for the past six months - where I spent my money on what date and for how much - really, that was enough information for me to recall much of what transpired over those six months in my life.

I think of the atonement like a bank, where we each have an account. All deposits and

withdrawals are carefully recorded, where, when, for how much - and much more detail than banks even keep track of - down to the penny. During the atonement, it was as though Christ went, one at a time, to settle each account. He came to the teller and said, "I am here to settle the account of Debbi Woods." The teller looks up my record. She sees the balance. "Oh dear. I am afraid this account is terribly overdrawn." Christ says, "that is OK, I will settle it." She is about to tell him my total debt, but he says "No, I need to go item by item, start with the first item on her account." With a withering sigh - the teller scrolls and scrolls and scrolls to get back to the beginning and finally gets to the first withdrawal - where, when and how much it was. Christ counts out that amount one penny at a time. And so it continued for each of my withdrawals - and occasionally a deposit. He did this for me. And he has done the same thing for each and every one of us. We can't begin to comprehend it, but so it is. The thing is, he didn't pay in pennies. He paid in blood, sweat and tears. He felt everything we went through. If sometimes we ask, can the Lord really understand what I am going through? The answer is - exactly. For he already went through it in Gethsemane. We don't need to understand how, but the spirit will witness, if we ask, that in fact, He did.

Then, of course, he conquered death and rose from the dead opening the graves of all God's children to rise again perfect and whole.

He organized his church. He sent the Holy Ghost to guide and comfort us. His efforts in our behalf never end.

So, should we honor him? Of course.

How should we honor him? I think it is similar to how we can honor our parents.

We can take care of the things he provided us, like the earth and all its resources - and our own bodies - for all these are his creations.

We can appreciate what he has done, and thank our Heavenly Father in his name each day in prayer.

We can listen to what he says - by reading his words, in the scriptures and listening to his prophet, and listening to the Holy Ghost that reveals his will to us.

We can live the lessons he teaches us.

We can pour out our hearts in prayer and share our joys and sorrows and dreams with him.

We can seek his counsel by searching for answers in the scriptures and in prayer.

As for the atonement, let us look at one more aspect of it. While Christ counted out each penny to the teller, she received and recorded his payment, BUT - it has not yet been deposited in our account. He cannot take back a penny of it - for you cannot take back blood, sweat and tears. But something is required of us to have that payment to be deposited in our account to bring it into

balance.

- First, we must acknowledge it. If we had to look at the detailed record of our lives it would overwhelm us - but we must acknowledge that he has indeed paid all our outstanding debts. We do this by **faith**.
- We must enter into a partnership with him so that his payment can be accounted to us. We do this through **baptism**.
- And we must bring all we have, meager as it is, and continue to bring all we can to be accounted toward that debt as well - we do this through **repentance** both before and after baptism.
- His work is great, we must assist in it. We do this by **service**.

He said to his disciples at the Last Supper -

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. John 13:24-25

and in Mosiah 2:17

when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God.

This is what Max is about to embark on as a missionary, serving the people of Russia by bringing them this great news of Christ. It is what we all do by serving in callings and in our families and neighborhoods, at school and work - there is no shortage of opportunities to serve.

But there yet remains one thing. When all of this is done, we will be asked a question. We will be asked if we can extend the same mercy to others that Christ extended to us. For along with standing at the teller and paying penny by penny for our account - he did the same thing for each and every person who has ever offended us in any way, large or small, terrible or slight. And when we forgive others, whatever they have done to hurt us, we acknowledge the payment Christ made in THEIR behalf - and when we do - at last, all he paid in OUR behalf can and will be deposited into our account, bringing it into perfect balance.

So repeating again Paul's words about Christ to the Colossians - he presents "you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight" he presents us to the Father perfect so that we may enter his presence again and there continue in light till we really truly are LIKE him.

There is little doubt whether Christ deserves our honor, our loving respect, and he has outlined how we are to do that through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. May the people of Russia come to know and understand and apply these things - some, as a result of Max's service there - and may we do so as well, is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.