

Mothers as a Type of Christ

I am honored and humbled to speak regarding the noblest calling God has given to women: Mother. The First Presidency of the Church has been affirming for decades that "motherhood is near to divinity" indeed it is "the highest, holiest service ... assumed by mankind." (James R. Clark)

I have not yet been blessed to bear and raise my own children, but I was set apart to this calling long before I ever entered mortality. I have painfully sought my children and struggled with the injunction to "multiply and replenish the earth." The Lord's ways are not my ways, but I know He will remember each of us. For now, Sister Dew and I share the belief that, "Perhaps it is precisely because I have not had the privilege of bearing children that I feel so deeply about the majesty and magnificence of motherhood."

In the 171st Semi-Annual General Conference, she went on to declare, "We need not enjoy the blessing of marriage to be a mother. While we tend to equate motherhood solely with maternity, in the Lord's language, the word mother has layers of meaning. Of all the words they could have chosen to define her role and her essence, both God the Father and Adam called Eve "the mother of all living" —and they did so before she ever bore a child. Like Eve, our motherhood began before we were born. Just as worthy men were foreordained to hold the priesthood in mortality, righteous women were endowed premortally with the privilege of motherhood. Motherhood is more than bearing children, though it is certainly that. It is the essence of who we are as women. It defines our very identity, our divine stature and nature, and the unique traits our Father gave us."

I maintain that every woman who righteously follows the example of Christ is a mother. As we explore the layers of Motherhood, we can see how mothers act as a type of Christ:: our Creator, our Healer, and Savior.

CREATOR

The first layer of Motherhood to be addressed is creator. While translating the gospel of John, Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon received a vision, which revealed "That by [Christ], and through [Christ], and of [Christ], the worlds are and were created..." Bruce R. McConkie affirmed "Truly Christ is the Creator of the future abode of the spirit children of the Father. But he does not work alone. The Creation is an organized venture; each of the other noble and great spirits plays his part. And the earth is created from matter that already exists. Truly the elements are eternal, and to create is to organize." (Ensign, June 1982)

Women too have been blessed with the power of creation. N. Eldon Tanner confirmed that, "Women . . . are copartners with God in bringing his spirit children into the world." (Ensign, January 1977) Within their wombs the bodies of spirit children are organized. Through the union and cooperation of families, children are created.

The birth of children is a glorious initiation, but women do not just play a part in creating families physically. The genesis of celestial families is born day by day as women organize the daily affairs of their homes. Do mothers have help? Of course, they must. But by divine design women have been given leadership over nurturing children. In the simple scheduling of humble tasks like family meals, laundry, and scripture study, eternal families are created.

HEALER

A second layer of Motherhood is that of Healer. In the words of Patricia Holland, "I've come to know that the one who is playing happily is so preoccupied with pleasant experiences that he sometimes may not respond when I call and may even run farther away. But the child who has been hurt, or is in pain, seeks me out, comes to me readily, knocks at my door (if you will), and is anxious for me to help and be healed . . . Can you make the transition from this motherly concern . . . to the perfect parental concern of heaven? "

Alma spoke beautifully of Christ's atonement and how Christ would "take upon himself all our infirmities, that his bowels might be filled with mercy, and that he might know according to the flesh, how to succor his people. " (Alma 7:12)

On Saturday I was in a biking accident. My wheel went into a sewer grate, which stopped my bike as I continued my propulsion over the handlebars. At this point gravity took control and landed me rather indelicately on the road. I was blessed to walk away with only a few scrapes and bruises. Although I did not require much physical attention, I longed for an emotional balm. I tried to smile as my well-meaning husband delivered band-aids and compliments on my endurance and sturdiness, but it was the mothers who delivered relief. It was the mothers who put their arms around me, who melted at concern for my welfare, who wrote me notes, and brought me flowers and antioxidants. It was my own sweet mother, who with no earthly knowledge of the accident, was inspired with concern and called me repeatedly to know of my welfare. And although I appreciate her wealth of knowledge on natural tonics; it was the salve of mercy and love that left me feeling comforted.

For who but a mother knows each wound received by a child. Who but a mother is continuously there to succor and assure. Who but a mother can help us begin to understand the unending love of our Savior, and the healing power of his atonement.

In the words of Joseph F. Smith, "I have often said, and will repeat it, that the love of a true mother comes nearer being like the love of God than any other kind of love.

"No woman who understands the gospel would ever think that any other work is more important or would ever say, 'I am just a mother,' for mothers heal the souls of men.

"Perhaps the most perfect ideal in the art of healing is the mother whose tender and gracious love asserts itself in taking away the sting of a deserved or an undeserved punishment. How her love heals every wound! How quick her caresses bind up and soothe!"

SAVIOR

A final layer of motherhood is that of savior. We have but one Redeemer, but as we have illustrated, mothers are a type of Christ. And as we struggle to understand our Savior's atonement, we can look to the example of mothers. Like the atonement, Motherhood was and is a choice. Just as Christ stood and said, "Here am I send me." Eve partook and said, "Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed"

Our relief society general presidency has taught, "Eve set the pattern. In addition to bearing children, she mothered all of mankind when she made the most courageous decision any woman has ever made and with Adam opened the way for us to progress. Like the Savior, "who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross," Eve, for the joy of helping initiate the human family, endured the Fall. She loved us enough to help lead us." (Sherry Dew)

As women we are called on to sacrifice perceived Edens to bear children and create families. Women are qualified and capable of doing so many things, so very well. Anyone who knows my mother-in-law knows she could successfully lead a nation, let alone a company. But she chose to use her talents and faith to lead leaders. I bless her name everyday for raising righteous sons and daughters, one of whom would become my eternal companion. The role of nurturing children was not what was left over after men were asked to provide for their welfare. Satan has done a great work in deceiving the world as to the power of motherhood. But righteous women must never say apologetically, "I am just a mother."

Elder Matthew Cowley taught that "men have to have something given to them [in mortality] to make them saviors of men, but not mothers, not women. [They] are born with

an inherent right, an inherent authority, to be the saviors of human souls ... and the regenerating force in the lives of God's children."

Mothers lead by example as Christ led us. We cannot save our children, but we can teach them to look to One who can. Give liberally of your grace and angels will attend you in your calling.

TYPES OF CHRIST

The Old Testament contains several types of Christ. These forerunning examples were delivered to help mankind recognize and understand the Savior: Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his only son Isaac; Joseph of Egypt sold into bondage, rising above his circumstances, and saving his family and the nation from famine. Indeed it is righteous mothers who have the humbling responsibility to introduce their children to Christ through their own acts of creation, healing, and unending love.

In the book of Isaiah, Christ asks, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands;" Christ showed us the way by laboring in body and spirit to deliver unconditional immortality and conditional eternal life to his brothers and sisters. Mothers are given the opportunity to follow in his footsteps as they "bear children in pain of spirit." As Christ bears the wounds of mankind on his body, so a woman can wear the wounds of bearing and raising children on her body like badges of honor. No women should ever shamefully regret a stretch mark on her womb, a wrinkle of service under her eyes, or a dress dirtied with the tears of her children.

Joseph F. Smith prophesied, "For mother is the word that will define a righteous woman made perfect in the highest degree of the celestial kingdom, a woman who has qualified for eternal increase in posterity, wisdom, joy, and influence.

I call upon women everywhere to find someone who could use your love and influence. Sister Ardeth G. Kapp of the Young Women General Presidency taught, "You need not possess children to love them. Loving is not synonymous with possessing, and possessing is not necessarily loving. The world is filled with people to be loved, guided, taught, lifted, and inspired." Each woman must ask her Father in Heaven how he would have her magnify her calling, and who he would have her mother. I know my Savior; he is my creator, my healer, my redeemer. I am honored to be a mother. Though I have not born children in the flesh, I declare I am a mother. I have been called to nurture, to love, to render grace, and to lead by example. So too every women in this audience has been called. You have been given a divine power. As we call upon our men to honor their priesthood, women we must honor our motherhood.