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## John 1.<sup>14-18</sup>

<sup>14</sup>And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

<sup>15</sup>John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, “This was he of whom I spake, ‘He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me.’” <sup>16</sup>And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. <sup>17</sup>For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup>No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

### Meditation

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We have all had occasion, I suppose, to introduce ourselves to another, offer an introduction of another, or be the object of another’s introduction. Introductions assume a previous unfamiliarity and even ignorance, and transform the unknown into the known. The author of the Gospel of John began his work with an introduction. “In the beginning was the Word.”<sup>1</sup> This “Word,” about whom he will have much to say in the course of his Gospel, is to be the principal subject of his work.

Sometimes an introduction might be accompanied with a qualifier. For example, an introduction might go something like this:

“Let me introduce you to Scott.”

The follow up qualifier might go something like, “My friend,” or “My neighbor” or “My husband,” or “My pastor.”

So, here, the evangelist offers qualifiers that identify “the Word” as “God” and the “Light of men.”<sup>2</sup> In his work, he will greatly expand upon this introduction and the accompanying qualifiers.

Having ever so briefly introduced his main subject, the evangelist moves on to a second introduction: “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.”<sup>3</sup> The evangelist’s introduction of John is common enough but something strange happens when he moves on to the qualifier, for the qualifier does not tell us who or what John *is*, but what he is *not*. “He was *not* that Light.”<sup>4</sup>

Huh.

A few verses later, we encounter another introduction and another qualifier. Religious leaders, based in the religious capital of Jerusalem, sent emissaries out into the Judean wilderness, we are informed, to ask the Baptist, “Who art thou?”<sup>5</sup> Of course, we would be within our rights to assume that they very well knew his name. Rumors about him had spread like wildfire. So, what they were really after was a qualifier. But, again, we are presented with a strange qualifier that once more focuses on who or what he is *not* rather than who or what he is. “He confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John 1.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>2</sup> John 1.<sup>1, 4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> John 1.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> John 1.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> John 1.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>6</sup> John 1.<sup>20</sup>

Huh.

After repeatedly being pressed for a more informative introduction, the Baptist finally offered, “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness.”<sup>7</sup>

“Well, da! We know you are not part of the establishment, but an untrusted outsider. We are also aware of your belief and teaching that Israel, God’s chosen people and land, is a spiritual wasteland. But we demand justification for who and what you are and what you do.”

I am not sure how pleased they were with his response.

“There standeth one among you, whom ye know not; he it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe’s latchet I am not worthy to unloose.”<sup>8</sup>

These seems, like all that has gone before like an attempt to deflect attention from himself to a “preferred” other. Later, when John and Jesus met at the water’s edge, the Baptist repeated his now familiar refrain, “This is he of whom I said” he “is preferred before me.”<sup>9</sup>

Again, all of this is more statement about who the Baptist was *not* than about who he *was*. Apparently, the Baptist felt—and the Gospel writer agreed—that his interrogators were asking the wrong questions and focusing on the wrong person. Indeed, it is as though both John, the evangelist, and John, the Baptist were worried about the Baptist becoming a distraction, causing audiences present and future to lose focus on him who truly IS—the God who is Christ. History suggests that this is not an unreasonable worry. Servants of God, prophets in particular, often seem to have an unintended diversionary effect on believers and unbelievers alike. I reckon my own LDS faith with its strong emphasis on prophets to have often fallen into this trap.

This concern about prophetic diversion explains the rather stark contrast found in this reading between prophets—typified by the prototypical Moses—and Jesus. “The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” Just imagine living in a world of law without divine grace and fidelity to the individual! That’s the world of prophets without Jesus. For even the best, most enlightened of prophets possess not one iota of grace that they can offer to another. Nor do they possess the smallest fraction of fidelity to others that Jesus possesses. Stark, to say the least.

This, then brings us back to introductions and to the one introduction that is more important, more life-changing, and more life-saving than any other. This introduction is found in verse 18 of today’s text,

“No one has ever grasped God. The only child, God, who is particularly intimate with the Father, he it is who has introduced Him.”<sup>10</sup>

It is the evangelist’s testimony that Jesus came to earth to make an introduction. He came to introduce his Father to humankind. Jesus was able to do this because he is born of God in a way unlike any other and so knows God more intimately than any other.

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<sup>7</sup> John 1.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>8</sup> John 1.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>9</sup> John 1.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Author’s translation

Now, personal introductions are necessary because parties are unfamiliar with each other. Obviously, in the case of Jesus' introduction of God, it was not a matter of God being unfamiliar with humanity. Rather, it was a matter of humanity being unfamiliar with God. It is the Evangelist's view that all that humanity had ever said, thought, or heard about God had been, at best, incomplete. It had often been downright wrong. In his teachings and, even more importantly, in his manner of life (and death), Jesus presented, introduced God as He really is. He could do this, of course, because he was God.

Because of the nature of Jesus and the perfect introductory portrayal of God that he is, the Gospels arguably contain the most intimate and accurate, the most first-person revelation of God found anywhere in scripture. In Jesus, we find the true temple of God, where "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily,"<sup>11</sup> where God's face is best seen, and where His beauty shines most resplendently.

If John the Evangelist and John the Baptist are obsessed with the person of Jesus and with pointing out, over and over again, the inferiority of themselves and all other servants of God, we would do well to become similarly obsessed. We would do well to examine the Jesus of the Gospels and to directly and intimately seek his presence in our lives. We would do well to accept his invitation and allow him to introduce us to his Father to whom he was so devoted and who was so devoted to him. And what better time than the Christmas season.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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<sup>11</sup> Colossians 2.<sup>9</sup>

## John 1.<sup>37-42</sup>

<sup>37</sup>And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. <sup>38</sup>Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, "What seek ye?"

They said unto him, "Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou?"

<sup>39</sup>He saith unto them, "Come and see."

They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour.

<sup>40</sup>One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

<sup>41</sup>He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, "We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ." <sup>42</sup>And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, "Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone."

## Meditation

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Words matter. Alma concluded that words, the word of God specifically, "had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just" (Alma 31.<sup>5</sup>). Words can also have deleterious effects, as Americans have recently witnessed as the beguiling and deceitful words of powerful people have stoked confusion, hatred and insurrection.

As we have pointed out elsewhere, although the first uttered mortal words might have been near anything, Genesis' author/ editors chose these arrogant and dismissive words as the first recorded words of a mortal being: "Am I my brother's keeper?" This choice of first words serves as a signal of the author's/ editors' view of the nature of humans in a fallen, mortal world. They all too often are self-serving and dismissive of the needs of others.

In like manner, Jesus's first words might have been any one of dozens. His first "ministerial" words might have been any of thousands. Each Gospel writer offers his own first recorded words. Luke, for example has Jesus' first recorded words as those spoken to his mother when she expressed dismay at his seeming insensitivity to her feelings and worries when he had seemed lost to her.

"Why have you been searching for me? Didn't you know that I would certainly be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2.<sup>49</sup>, author's translation)

Luke uses such first words to indicate the centrality of the Father in Jesus' thoughts and actions. This same author chose to end Jesus' mortal words with those in which Jesus makes his final mortal appeal. "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23.<sup>46</sup>).

In beginning his Gospel, John has spoken of Jesus in the most exalted terms. Jesus is "the word of God." He *is* God. He is the "Light." He is chuck full of "grace and truth." His origins are in "the bosom of the Father." He is "Messiah," "Son" and "Lamb of God." Given all of this, we might expect Jesus' first recorded words to be some heavy, deep theological insight. We are surprised, then, by the mundane nature of Jesus' first words as recorded by John. Seeing a couple of the Baptist's disciples hanging around, seemingly curious about Jesus, the "Word of God" asks, "What seek ye?"

However mundane, perhaps the simple question is meant to send a powerful and hopeful message. Jesus is interested in other's needs, what they want and what they "seek." The question Jesus poses to two strangers in Judea is the question he poses to each individual who is curious and interested in him. He lived on earth then and lives in heaven now to selflessly assist others in all their heartfelt searches, in all uncertainties, and in all their needs. As we contemplate John's witness that, while

Jesus is someone extraordinary, he is sincerely interested in meeting the real needs of all, we are reminded of the Psalmist's similar testimony.

“Though the LORD be high,  
yet hath he respect unto the lowly” (Ps138.6).

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## **John 1.** <sup>43-51</sup>

<sup>43</sup>The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, "Follow me." <sup>44</sup>Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. <sup>45</sup>Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, "We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

<sup>46</sup>And Nathanael said unto him, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

Philip saith unto him, "Come and see."

<sup>47</sup>Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!"

<sup>48</sup>Nathanael saith unto him, "Whence knowest thou me?"

Jesus answered and said unto him, "Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee."

<sup>49</sup>Nathanael answered and saith unto him, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel."

<sup>50</sup>Jesus answered and said unto him, "Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? Thou shalt see greater things than these." <sup>51</sup>And he saith unto him, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."

## **m**editation

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In his introductory chapter, John has been a very busy evangelist, indeed. He has imbued Jesus of Nazareth with a host of titles and divine attributes. Just have a look! Jesus is

The Word  
The True Light  
The Only Begotten of the Father  
The Lamb of God  
The Son of God  
The Messiah/ God  
The King of Israel

He is  
Full of grace and truth  
In the Bosom of God  
God's Introducer  
Holy Spirit Baptizer  
Like unto Moses

Oh, and we left this one out: God. Jesus is God.

Phew.

Up to this point It is the evangelist that has done all this heavy lifting in naming and characterizing Jesus. But now, at the end of the chapter, Jesus flexes his muscles. Astounding Nathaniel with his insight, Jesus warns, "you ain't seen nothing yet."

"Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."

This seems a clear reference to the Hebrew Patriarch, Jacob, and his experience at Beth-el—House of God. Here, he saw a ladder, its foot rooted in the soil and its head extending into heaven. All night, Jacob watched angels march up and down the ladder, descending to the temple and ascending into heaven. Unbeknownst to him, Jacob had alighted and slumbered at the center of the earth. The earth's navel.

In encountering Jesus, Nathaniel, unbeknownst to him, had come to Beth-el. Or, in this case, Beth-el had come to him. John allows Jesus, God, Himself, to end his introductory chapter of naming and characterizing with a flourish.

Jesus is God's temple.

He is the dwelling place of God.

Jesus is the place one must go if they wish to meet and greet and understand God.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!



## John 4.<sup>1-3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, <sup>2</sup>(Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,) <sup>3</sup>he left Judæa, and departed again into Galilee.

### **m**editation

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As is the case in this reading, throughout his mortal ministry Jesus was anxious about drawing too much attention to himself. Several individuals—for example, Jairus, whose daughter was raised from the dead, two blind men, Peter, who announced his belief that Jesus was Messiah, and others—were asked to remain quiet about him, what he did, or who he was. There might have been strategic reasons for staying under the radar—for example, a desire to avoid the envy of religious leaders and potential conflict with them. However, it seems likely that Jesus’ attitude during his mortal ministry was the same as that which he expressed to W.W. Phelps from heaven in 1831:

“He hath need to repent, for I, the Lord, am not well pleased with him, *for he seeketh to excel*, and he is not sufficiently meek before me” (DC 58.<sup>41</sup>).

It was inconsistent with the divine character to “seek to excel” or to act out of a desire for “selfish ambition or conceit” (See Phil. 2.<sup>3</sup>). Hence, Paul reminds us that Jesus “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant” (Phil. 2.<sup>7</sup>).

It is a difficult thing Jesus did. It is a difficult area in which to follow him. We humans have extraordinarily fragile egos. We like very much to pump them up by attracting attention and having a reputation for excel(lence). But if we would be true disciples of Jesus, we must check such natural man tendencies. This requires constant vigilance and honest introspection. And even then... well, let’s just be thankful for the opportunities to repent, not once or twice, but over and over again, ad-infinitum.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## **John 4.**<sup>4-6</sup>

<sup>4</sup>And he must needs go through Samaria. <sup>5</sup>Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. <sup>6</sup>Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour.

### **m**editation

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It is John's contention that Jesus was "the Word" who had been with God from the beginning and that, in fact, "was God." Consistent with this, it is LDS contention that Jesus is the God, Yahweh. The Old Testament portrays Yahweh as the most incredible of Beings. His power is immense, infinite, and beyond human comprehension. So, when I read that Jesus was "wearied"—exhausted from the normal trials of life and those unique to his calling—I appreciate a little more the sacrifice he made in setting aside his power and glory and coming to earth. I realize a little better how fully he condescended to become like us—"like unto his brethren" (2.<sup>17</sup>), as the writer of Hebrews put it. I realize more fully how completely he took "upon him [our] infirmities" (Al. 7.<sup>12</sup>). And when I realize how much it cost him to associate with us—with me—my love and appreciation for him grows and my heart is drawn to him. My faith that "he is able to succour them [me] that are tempted" (Heb. 3.<sup>18</sup>) grows firmer. My commitment to "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that [I] may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4.<sup>16</sup>) is strengthened.

So, I hope John knows that though it might seem like a trifle to note Jesus' weariness, that trifle has drawn me into a more loving embrace with the Greatest of All. I thank the evangelist for that.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## **j**ohn 4.<sup>7-9</sup>

<sup>7</sup>There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, "Give me to drink."<sup>8</sup>(For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.)

<sup>9</sup>Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, "How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? For the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans."

### **m**editation

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Jesus was exhausted. That alone might have been justification for avoiding an encounter with anyone. Surely, a few minutes rest could not be viewed as a violation of his call. But, add to Jesus' exhaustion the fact that his fellow well visitor was a Samaritan and we can double the justifications for avoiding an encounter. Samaritans were apostates. They were unclean. Their uncleanness was contagious. Jesus could not risk defilement.

But this Samaritan had a triple whammy against her. She was a "she." Jewish men did not associate in any way with other woman—let alone a woman with the sort of checkered past the Samaritan woman at the well possessed and about which we learn more later in the narrative. Even an innocent encounter between unmarried men and women was cause for scandal not unlike a modern scandal of real and physical adultery. So, when Jesus engaged her, even for something as seemingly innocent as a drink of water, the woman was right to question him: "How is it that thou... askest drink of me?" How indeed.

The question we ask ourselves in this meditation is how much like Jesus do we dare be? How daring can we be in associating with those whom society deems undesirable and even defiling? Jesus dared the ultimate scandal in order to serve and bless. How likely is it that a true disciple will manage to avoid scandal as they go out into the world with their message of hope? It seems not likely at all. In fact, it seems that those who claim discipleship and at the same time avoid scandal may just not be disciples at all.

We remember Jesus' admonition to his disciples on his final night. After washing his disciples feet as a metaphor for service to others that might be less than complimentary, perhaps even humiliating, Jesus admonished them to go and do likewise (See Jn. 13.<sup>14-17</sup>). Following the invitation to "Come, follow me," is not without its risks.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## John 4.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Jesus answered and said unto her, “If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, ‘Give me to drink;’ thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.”

### **m**editation

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The story of Jesus’ encounter with the woman at the well begins with a notice about Jesus’ own personal exhaustion. As we noted in our meditation on the passage (vs. 4-6), this notice is legitimate and reminds us of the sacrifice Jesus made in coming to earth and experiencing all the vicissitudes of life just like us. With this reading, we note that in addition to being weary, Jesus was apparently thirsty too. So, he asked the Samaritan woman for a drink. She asked why he would make such a request of her.

With this, we become mesmerized by the back and forth that takes place between Jesus and the woman. There is much there to mesmerize. But, today, I wish to note this strange fact: nowhere does the narrative inform us that Jesus ever got that much needed drink for which he asked. Now, I am not sure that this was a planned omission of John’s part. He may not have meant the omission to be meaningful, even if he noticed it himself. Nevertheless, we find meaning in the omission. The fact that there is no record of Jesus having his thirst quenched is consistent with all that Jesus said about his personal ministry and about his objectives in coming to earth. Jesus did not come to earth and did not engage, really, with the woman in order to have his own needs met—to have us or the woman serve him. Rather, as he, himself, implied, his reason for engaging her, as with us, was to serve her and to address her needs: “If thou knewest... who it is that saith to thee, ‘Give me to drink;’ thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee.”

But there is more. If the woman had known who he was, she would have known, not only that his engagement with her was driven by his desire to meet her needs, as it is with us, but in hopes that she, learning from him, would go and do likewise. His spirit of service was the basis for the enduring life he had lived for eternity and would live for eternities more to come. If she, herself, would adopt and live Jesus’ life of service rather than being served, this woman would be able to drink the same waters of life from which he drank.

We are invited to drink from those same waters that make possible an enduring existence. We are invited to think on and strive to meet others’ needs and put our own needs aside. And yes, as Jesus, we may suffer some temporal inconveniences in doing and living so. But the sweetness of the “living waters” will more than make up for any minor deprivations that might come our way along the way.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## **J**ohn 4.<sup>11-14</sup>

<sup>11</sup>The woman saith unto him, “Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water? <sup>12</sup>Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?”

<sup>13</sup>Jesus answered and said unto her, “Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: <sup>14</sup>but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”

### **m**editation

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John is very fond of playing off individuals’ trivial misunderstandings as found in the statements or queries they make of or to Jesus. John engages in this play in order to present deeper meanings. Sometimes these plays off misunderstandings take on ironic and even almost comic aspects.

For example, we smile to ourselves when we hear Nicodemus greet Jesus with “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God” (Jn. 3.<sup>2</sup>). However complimentary Nicodemus meant to be with this greeting, we know that Jesus is “a teacher come from God” in a far deeper sense that Nicodemus appreciated, at least at this first meeting.

The questions with which the woman at the well met Jesus’ offer of “living water” is another example. We almost laugh out loud when she asks, “Art thou greater than our father Jacob?” Why, of course he is. He is greater than Jacob (or any other human being) by a wider margin than she could possibly imagine—more than we imagine, even today, with all our hindsight. We don’t so much laugh as sit up straighter and feel more reverence and humility when she observes that Jesus “has nothing to draw with, and the well is deep.” We know, a little bit anyway, about how unimaginably deep the well is from which Jesus draws water. We know a little bit about how unimaginably difficult the water was and is to access. We know a little about what it cost Jesus to dig this well of living water. How deep into the bowels of earth, into the maw of hell he had to go to accomplish the wonder and make the water available to anyone interested.

Hopefully, too, we know a little about just how superior Jesus’ water is to those of any other well. Jesus’s water satisfies as no other. Its satisfaction never fades. One doesn’t have to keep coming back over and over again to relive the satisfaction. For Jesus accomplishes the greatest wonder of them all when the water begins to bubble up inside us and we become, ourselves, “a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” This is the greatest excavation of them all. The excavation of the human heart and soul. The turning of the human heart away from its ways of death to one that acts in ways that produce life—life in ourselves, to be sure, but a source of life that we freely offer to others as Jesus offered his to us.

Oh, yes, he is greater than Jacob. His well is deeper than Jacob’s well. The water of his well is sweeter and more nourishing than the water of Jacob’s well. At so it is with every other digger of wells and every other source of water.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## John 4.<sup>15-18</sup>

<sup>15</sup>The woman saith unto him, “Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw.”

<sup>16</sup>Jesus saith unto her, “Go, call thy husband, and come hither.”

<sup>17</sup>The woman answered and said, “I have no husband.”

Jesus said unto her, “Thou hast well said, ‘I have no husband:’ <sup>18</sup>For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly.”

### Meditation

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The woman who encountered Jesus at the well was surprised and maybe a bit offended at Jesus’ apparent familiarity with her, a Samaritan and a female. Both designations, she seems to have felt, ought to have caused Jesus to keep his distance and avoid her. Witnessing Jesus’ converse with the woman at the well, Jesus’ disciples were also surprised and concerned, so much so that they questioned him about it. No doubt, their concern was based upon the same feelings and perceptions. In addition, they were likely worried about what others might think and the possible spread of gossip and negative rumors about his habits and character—of which there was already too many. Jesus seems remarkably unconcerned, almost cavalier about any blowback from this encounter.

But, in addition to the two strikes we have already seen she had against her, in this reading we discover she had a third: she was a cereal marrier and divorcee who was currently shacking up with some guy. However scandalous this living arrangement has been viewed during my 65 years, plus, it pales in comparison to the scandal it would have caused in Jesus’ time. This woman would likely have been at the bottom of the rung even in Samaritan society. To a religious Jew, she must have been below the lowest. So, yes, Jesus’ encounter with the woman is triply surprising. We might be excused if we join the woman and Jesus’ disciples in surprise. Except, of course, it’s Jesus. He made a habit of thumbing his nose at social etiquette when it came to questions of social hierarchy. He made a habit of hanging out with all the wrong sorts of people.

But because of his willingness to open himself up to personal ridicule by opening himself up to those open to the charge of “sinner,” Jesus is able to open up for the sinner a whole new horizon and a whole new life. This is a reflection of his grace or graciousness. He is as open today as he was then, for he is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. He changeth not. And, of course, he leaves us with this invitation: “Follow thou me.” We will certainly not be “*full* of grace and fidelity” as he is, but even the smallest portion of Christlike grace and fidelity can do immeasurable good in the world.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## John 4.<sup>19-24</sup>

<sup>19</sup>The woman saith unto him, “Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet. <sup>20</sup>Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.”

<sup>21</sup>Jesus saith unto her, “Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. <sup>22</sup>Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. <sup>23</sup>But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. <sup>24</sup>God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”

### Meditation

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After spending just a few brief moments alone with Jesus, the woman at the well made a determination. This man who spoke with her so unexpectedly and comfortably and who seemed to know her in ways he should not, had to be a prophet. So, she presented the dilemma that every other Samaritan likely faced—male or female, child, youth, adult, and aged alike: “Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.”

One could, I suppose, hear in the woman’s statement a challenge to traditional Jewish—and thus, presumably, Jesus’—temple theology. But, if Jesus heard it like this, he paid it no heed. Instead, it treated it like the sincere question that it seems to have been: “Where is the appropriate place to worship God?” Or, maybe even more personally, “Where can I find God?”

Jesus answered that the where is less important than the how. In fact, in the future, indeed in the very present, the how will be everything. And how *does* one come to God? How must one conduct themselves in order to commune with him? They must come “in spirit and in truth.” No doubt, this means many things. But, as a baseline, one must come impassioned and sincere. Here, we read “spirit,” in the same sense that we might read the words, “school spirit.” We must possess “God spirit.” We must be filled with a desire for him such as the Psalmist expressed:

“As the hart panteth after the water brooks,  
so panteth my soul after thee, O God.  
My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God:  
when shall I come and appear before God?” (Ps. 42.<sup>1-2</sup>)

We must be honest. We must reveal every thought. We must mean every word we say. Nothing can be hidden. There can be no “hypocrisy and no deception before God.” There must be “real intent” (2 Ne. 31.<sup>13</sup>). Imagine our surprise when we find a God who “is Spirit.” We won’t worry so much about what this *doesn’t* mean that we will miss at least a little part of what it *does* mean. And the little part that this *does* mean is positively huge. Humongous. Gargantuan. God is as full of “spirit” as we are. Nay, a million times more. Nay, limitless times more. He is as excited and enthusiastic about having us come to him and we are to come to him. He is far more devoted to us than we are to him. It will not be an equal trade. We will get far more than we give. And we can discover these truths about God anywhere. Anytime. In any garb. Indeed, in this very hour.

Even so, come, Lod Jesus!

## **John 4.**<sup>25-30</sup>

<sup>25</sup>The woman saith unto him, “I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things.”

<sup>26</sup>Jesus saith unto her, “I that speak unto thee am he.”

<sup>27</sup>And upon this came his disciples, and marvelled that he talked with the woman: yet no man said, “What seekest thou?” or, “Why talkest thou with her?”

<sup>28</sup>The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, <sup>29</sup>“Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?”

<sup>30</sup>Then they went out of the city, and came unto him.

### **m**editation

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On one occasion during his earthly ministry, Jesus entered the home of two women. Sisters. One of them, Luke informs us, “was distracted by all the preparations” necessary to his visit, while the other “sat at Jesus’ feet” listening to him teach. Upon the first sister’s complaint about the other’s lack of help in the preparations, Jesus suggested that the distractions of the first was keeping her from choosing, as the second sister did, the “one thing [that] is needful.” We know the sisters’ names: Martha and Mary, respectively. And we know that Mary, in focusing her attention on Jesus and the words of God that he spoke, chose “that good part” (See Lk. 10.<sup>38-42</sup>).

The woman at the well goes unnamed. To this day, she remains anonymous: “The Woman at the Well.” And yet, she demonstrates the same wisdom as the storied Mary. She too, gave up distraction for focused attention on Jesus. We see this rejection of distraction and her new focus, I sense, when, after her extended encounter with Jesus, the Evangelist informs us that she “left her waterpot, and went her way into the city.” What need had she of the waterpot? The well water that had been her objective in going to the well was no longer the priority. There was something far better than well water to be found there. Something far more important than water now held her attention and dictated her relationships with others. “Come,” she invited any who would hear, “see a man! A man who just might be Messiah.”

Yes, in the seemingly mundane observation that the woman abandoned her waterpot, we witness her follow the counsel Jesus had given in another place to another group of listeners: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness” (Mat. 6.<sup>33</sup>). All else is simply icing on the cake. The example of this anonymous “Woman at the Well” was as good as any Paul might have offered when he admonished the Colossians, “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3.<sup>2</sup>). The example of this still anonymous woman in rejecting distractions and focusing attention on Jesus can inspire us today. No doubt, she would say to us, “Go and do likewise.”

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!



## John 4.<sup>31-34</sup>

<sup>31</sup>In the mean while his disciples prayed him, saying, “Master, eat.”

<sup>32</sup>But he said unto them, “I have meat to eat that ye know not of.”

<sup>33</sup>Therefore said the disciples one to another, “Hath any man brought him ought to eat?”

<sup>34</sup>Jesus saith unto them, “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.

### **m**editation

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Upon arriving in the vicinity of the Samaritan city, Sychar, how ever many of Jesus’ disciples who were accompanying him left him to enter the city and buy food. During their absence, Jesus was engaged in his famous encounter with a Samaritan woman. The woman was surprised by Jesus’ comfortable request that she, an unclean Samaritan and a women, fetch him a drink of water from the well at which he sat relaxing from his wearying journey. Responding to her surprise, Jesus informed her that if she had understood to whom she was talking, *she* would have asked *him* drink, for he had a drink that was not apparent to her—a drink she knew not off, which he called “living water” (See Jn. 4.<sup>5-10</sup>). Eventually, because of the woman’s sincerity and testimony, Jesus revealed with a clearness unusual for him, that he was Messiah.

The encounter between Jesus and the woman continued until the return of his disciples. They “marvelled that he talked with the woman.” This marveling, however, they did silently, not daring to question him about the propriety of his actions. With the woman’s departure, the disciples urged Jesus to eat. He was surely hungry. His reply to his disciples’ urging shows how very similar his disciples and the Samaritan woman were. How so? you ask, puzzled and, perhaps, a tad scandalized at the suggestion. Listen to Jesus’ reply:

“I have [food] to eat that ye know not of.”

How similar to what Jesus had earlier told the woman which was, essentially: “I have water that ye know not of.” Jesus was, he informed his disciples, nourished above all else by something that they could not see and had not discerned: “do[ing] the will of him that sent me, and... finish[ing] his work.” Jesus’ principal aim in life—and beyond—he informed the Samaritan woman, was to provide a nourishment to others that they, like her, could not see and had not discerned: giving “living waters.” How similar we all are to the undiscerning woman and undiscerning disciples! How blind we so often are to his expectations of and hopes for us. And yet and still, he endures our ignorance, patiently teaching, patiently waiting for us to understand and discern what cannot be seen.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## **John 4.** <sup>35-38</sup>

<sup>35</sup>Say not ye, “There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest?” Behold, I say unto you, “Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. <sup>36</sup>And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. <sup>37</sup>And herein is that saying true, ‘One soweth, and another reapeth.’ <sup>38</sup>I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours.”

### **m**editation

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After an arduous journey from Judea, Jesus and his disciples came to halt at a well outside the Samaritan village of Sychar. While Jesus rested, his disciples went into the village to purchase food for the entourage. While they were absent, Jesus had an extended encounter with a Samaritan woman who came to the well to draw water. When the disciples returned, they were surprised to find Jesus freely conversing with the woman, though they asked no explanation or offered any rebuke. They did, however, invite Jesus to join them in eating the rations purchased in the city. For the moment, Jesus refused the nourishment, telling them that he was nourished by doing and finishing the work his Father had given him to do. Again, we hear no response or rebuke from the disciples. Nevertheless, Jesus says,

“Say not ye, ‘There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest?’”

This statement seems to capture a thought that crossed the disciples’ minds as Jesus explained his reason for not eating in that moment. It is likely that this was a popular saying, meaning something like, “What’s the rush?” “There is plenty of time to relax right now.” “Relax now, work later.” Something along these lines. Jesus’ response was immediate and urgent.

“Behold, I say unto you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.”

No doubt, the disciples cared about Jesus and wanted him to take care of himself. They were simply being wise, as Jesus asked them to be on more than one occasion. But Jesus knew that time was short and that there was much to do. If there ever was a time to relax, this was not one of them: not for Jesus and not for Jesus’ disciples. There were many people ready to be gathered into the kingdom of God. So, Jesus invited them to look more carefully and rethink their rather cavalier attitude about the present and its needs.

As we consider Jesus’ sense of urgency, we wonder what application it has for us, for our service, and for our times. We wonder if we, like Jesus’ disciples on that day, are rather too cavalier about the seriousness of the present conditions, the world’s needs, and the numbers who are looking to be rescued from them. We wonder what more we can do to help in the Lord’s harvest of souls. We wonder, truly, how much more time we have.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## **John 4.**<sup>39-42</sup>

<sup>39</sup>And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, “He told me all that ever I did.”

<sup>40</sup>So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days. <sup>41</sup>And many more believed because of his own word; <sup>42</sup>and said unto the woman, “Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.”

### **m**editation

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In the 46<sup>th</sup> section of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord discusses various spiritual gifts that are available to those who come to Christ and have faith in him. Those listed are certainly not the only gifts, but what gifts they are! One of the gifts mentioned is that of believing the testimony of others as they testify “that Jesus Christ is the Son of God...” Such believers have the promise of “eternal life” (DC 46.<sup>14</sup>).

In our readings from John 4, we have witnessed the encounter between Jesus and the woman at the well. We have watched her conversion. We have heard the testimony she bore to other villagers: “is not this the Christ?” And we have been heartened to read that many villagers believed on Jesus “for the saying of the woman.” Here, perhaps, we are seeing an example of the gift to believe on other’s words catalogued in DC 46. These villagers’ testimony of Jesus by this means would have sufficed for their salvation.

DC 46 catalogues another spiritual gift: “To some it is given by the Holy Ghost to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God... (vs. 13). This, not through the words of others, but through some personal experience. It seems that many villages also experienced this spiritual gift. “We believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.”

To know, by any means, that Jesus is the Christ and to learn to trust him is glorious and saving. It is a gift beyond any other. No one can possess all the gifts. “To some is given one, and to some is given another” (DC 46.<sup>12</sup>). And yet, we can add to our gifts. We seem to see this multiplication of gifts at work in the villagers’ lives. First, they were convinced that Jesus was Messiah by the words of the woman at the well. Then, because they went in search of Jesus themselves and sought to have their own encounter with him, they can to know, not only his title, but the impact of that title in their own lives.

Here, we think of the Psalmist who, having heard of “the beauty of the LORD,” and having believed that report, nevertheless heard another more personal word, even the word of God: “Seek ye my face.” Inspired by the generous invitation, the Psalmist faithfully responded, “Thy face, LORD, will I seek” (See Ps. 27.<sup>4, 8</sup>). I too can testify with the woman, with the villagers, and with the Psalmist that the Lord is not far away but nigh at hand.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## John 10.<sup>1-5, 11-15, 27-30</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. <sup>2</sup>But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup>To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. <sup>4</sup>And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. <sup>5</sup>And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.

<sup>11</sup>I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup>But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. <sup>13</sup>The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.

<sup>14</sup>I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. <sup>15</sup>As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.

<sup>27</sup>My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: <sup>28</sup>and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup>My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. <sup>30</sup>I and my Father are a one.

### Meditation

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We cannot complain about Jesus calling himself “the good shepherd.” It is gratifying and lovely imagery. However, the title can allow the casual reader to inadvertently diminish the role that Jesus plays in our lives through misunderstanding. We could think of a “good” shepherd as someone who is a really, really good and conscientious tender and herder of sheep. In Jesus’ case, the absolute best, most caring and conscientious and capable shepherd to ever live. But Jesus is more than this. Much, much more.

This something more is made clear in the course of Jesus’ parable. First, Jesus says that the shepherd “calleth *his own sheep* by name.” Later, in mentioning hired shepherds “whose own the sheep are not,” Jesus admits that they will not be as protective or conscientious as “the good shepherd.” The employees will not know the sheep as the owner does. This is not meant to demean the hired hands. They may be very, very good at what they do. But they do not own the sheep. Jesus, on the other hand, is the owner. He is not simply “the good *shepherd*.” He is “the good *owner*.” Not as touchingly poetic imagery as that of the “shepherd,” but closer to the truth of Jesus’ character and his relationship to us.

I don’t know about you, but I feel better about being watched over by the owner than by the employee. No matter how concerned the employee may be for my welfare, the concern will never match that of the owner. No matter how skilled the employee, he has limited abilities and resources regardless of his desire or even claims that it be otherwise. On the other hand, there is no doubt in my mind about the owner’s interest in my present safety and future development. And there is no doubt in my mind about the resources that the owner can bring to bear in my benefit.

Given the nature of mortals, it is little wonder that the Psalmist concluded that “vain is the help of man” (Ps. 60.<sup>11</sup>), or that Isaiah counseled, “Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of (Is. 2.<sup>22</sup>)? Little wonder that Nephi committed himself to a course in which “I will not put my trust in the arm of flesh” (2 Ne. 4.<sup>34</sup>), or that Paul warned, “let no man glory in men” (1 Cor. 3.<sup>21</sup>). Even sheep herders with the best of intentions are as likely as not to abandon us to the wolves; indeed, too often turning wolfish themselves.

Given the nature of God, it is even less wonder that Moroni should declare that “relying *alone* upon the merits of Christ” was the only safe and wise counsel and course for sheep to pursue (See Moro. 6.<sup>4</sup>), or that the Psalmist should remind us that it is “through God [that] we shall do valiantly” (See Ps. 60.<sup>11-12</sup>); for “his name alone is excellent” (Ps. 148.<sup>13</sup>).

Jesus was not whistling dixie when he assured his listeners that only he could “give unto them eternal life” or that “they shall never perish” with him as their shepherd/ owner. He spoke truly when he assured them that while others would certainly lose sheep to wolves and strangers and thieves and robbers, only he was caring and powerful enough to keep the sheep safe and keep dangerous forces from plucking sheep out of his hand. Indeed, Jesus offers this almost too-good-to-be-true promise,

“I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day” (Jn. 6.<sup>38-39</sup>).

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## **John 10.**<sup>14, 27-29</sup>

<sup>14</sup>I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.

<sup>27</sup>My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: <sup>28</sup>and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup>My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

### **m**editation

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Maybe being “plucked” from Jesus’ watchful care, protection, and deliverance doesn’t exactly send chills up our backs. But the Greek word translated, “plucked,” means “to steal,” “to capture,” “to seize,” “to take by force.” I am sure all of us would object strongly to being “captured” and “taken by force” by anyone or anything.

This language suggests that there are powerful and hostile forces arrayed against us. These forces are thieves. These forces aim to steal us from Jesus and make us theirs. They aim to subjugate. As the thief is a force in the sheep’s life that is beyond its ability to resist, there are forces too powerful for us to stand against. We thus require a “good” shepherd.

The “good” shepherd is certainly interested in, observant of, and devoted to his sheep. The image of a “good” shepherd is lovely. But it takes more than “loveliness,” more than “interestedness” or “observance,” and more than “devotion” to protect us from the hostile forces that would thieve our souls. It requires power. And this is exactly what “good” shepherd means.

In addition to being “lovely” or “appealing,” the “good” (Grk., *kalós*) shepherd is “powerful,” “strong,” “serviceable,” “capable.” He is more than capable and powerful enough to protect us from the hostile forces arrayed against us. Indeed, he is “above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, he “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.”<sup>2</sup>

Now that’s capable. That’s power. That’s the sort of “good shepherd” we have and need.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 1.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 3.<sup>20</sup>

## **John 13.**<sup>36-38</sup>

<sup>36</sup>Simon Peter said unto him, “Lord, whither goest thou?”

Jesus answered him, “Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards.”

<sup>37</sup>Peter said unto him, “Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake.”

<sup>38</sup>Jesus answered him, “Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice.”

### **m**editation

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It is easy to understand the disciples’ anxiety and sadness over Jesus’ announcement, “Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, ‘Whither I go, ye cannot come;’ so now I say to you.” Jesus was amazing. Over three extraordinary years, the disciples had come to depend upon him. What would they do and be without him?

We hear the disciple’s discomfort at the news when Peter, undoubtedly speaking for each of them, pleaded questioningly, “Lord, whither goes thou?” This seems more than a request for information, data. Peter wishes to know Jesus’ destination because he is as committed to following Jesus wherever he may go as Jesus is to leaving—or so he imagines. When Jesus repeats the unwelcome news of his eminent departure, we hear the disciples’ growing panic in Peter’s, “Lord, why cannot I follow thee now?” Even a day, a minute without Jesus is, to Peter and the others characterized appropriately as “little children,” too much.

Seeking to change Jesus’ departure plans, Peter pulls out the trump card: “I will lay down my life for thy sake.” How, then, can Jesus think of abandoning the disciples? How can Jesus think of leaving behind disciples thoroughly dedicated to him just as he would the Jews who rejected and harassed him?

But Peter’s trump card fails spectacularly. Far from convincing Jesus to relent and change his plans, Peter’s declaration is revelatory of Peter’s profound lack of self-awareness. Peter knows little about himself. He thinks more highly of himself than he has a right to do. Jesus does not hold back in revealing Peter’s lack of self-awareness. “Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, the cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice.” Peter will deny Jesus, not once. Not twice. But three times.

This is brutal revelation. As Peter sees himself, he is one who would give his life for Jesus. But the reality of Peter as Jesus reveals it is about as far from Peter’s view of himself as is possible. Peter goes from a heroic warrior who dreams of coming to Jesus’ aid to denier who can only contribute, albeit little, to Jesus’ death!

As I read these verses, I can’t help but go beyond Peter’s lack of self-awareness. I can’t help considering the lack of self-awareness that nearly all of us carry with us nearly every day of our lives. I can’t help considering my own lack of self-awareness. It is embarrassing and shattering. I would rather turn my face away and not look.

But blindness about our true selves is impossible in Jesus’ presence. He is a light that “shineth in the darkness.” Though the “darkness comprehend[s] it not,” he comprehends the darkness.<sup>1</sup> His light illuminates even its darkest corners. He can certainly, then, see into our souls. Jesus, says John

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<sup>1</sup> See John 1.<sup>4-5</sup>

elsewhere, “needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, the Psalmist confessed,

“O LORD, thou hast searched me,  
and known me.  
Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising,  
thou understandest my thought afar off.”<sup>3</sup>

No matter how uncomfortable, we would all do well to allow Jesus into our lives to reform our lack of self-awareness and to reveal our true character. Though it may not be pleasant, Jesus is not only a great revelator, but a great teacher, an even better comforter, and the greatest of Saviors as we will see as we continue our examination of John’s report concerning Jesus’ final mortal hours.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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<sup>2</sup> John 2.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 139.<sup>1-2</sup>



## **John 14.**<sup>16–21, 23</sup>

<sup>16</sup>“And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; <sup>17</sup>Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

<sup>18</sup>I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. <sup>19</sup>Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. <sup>20</sup>At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.

<sup>21</sup>He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him....

<sup>23</sup>If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”

### **m**editation

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While enjoying the happy, spiritual, and intimate Passover meal in the great “upper room,” Jesus delivered this unexpected news to his most trusted disciples:

“Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you” (Jn. 13.<sup>33</sup>).

Peter, confused and saddened by this announcement, and seeming to speak for all, asks, as one would expect one to ask who had grown accustomed to and dependent upon Jesus’ reassuring presence, “Lord, whither goest thou?” (Jn. 13.<sup>36</sup>) Jesus, recognizing their sorrow—“because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart” (Jn. 16.<sup>6</sup>)—and in an attempt to soften the bad news he had delivered and the discomfort he has instilled, answers,

“Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards” (Jn. 13.<sup>36</sup>).

But his attempt to comfort seems not to have had its intended result.

“Peter said unto him, ‘Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake’” (Jn. 13.<sup>37</sup>)

It does not take the imagination of a poet to hear and appreciate the sorrow and worry in the disciples’ response to Jesus’ unwelcome announcement. They had spent three years with Jesus. In Jesus they had discovered a man of unmatched character. He had an answer for everything. He had a response to every need. It is difficult to overstate the degree to which the disciples had become attached to and dependent upon Jesus.

But those who have, themselves, had even the smallest taste of his greatness and goodness, it is easy to imagine. It is easy to imagine the disciples’ concerns. “What will we do without Jesus? How can we live without him? We have always known we were weak, not up to his standards, but he has made us stronger, better. If he leaves, what’s to stop us from going right back to the pathetic, small, undirected, worldly lives that we lived before he came into our lives?”

Yes, I can imagine their thoughts running something like this,

“Lone will be the night  
If I cannot commune with thee  
Nor find in thee my light.

The darkness of the world, I fear,  
Would in my home abide” (LDS Hymn #165, “Abide with Me; ‘Tis Eventide).

Yes, I can imagine the many questions sweeping through their minds. His departure was cause for worry indeed. And so, from Jesus’ next words—“Let not your hearts be troubled” (Jn. 14.<sup>1</sup>)— to the final words of his great Intercessory prayer—“that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them” (Jn. 17.<sup>26</sup>)—Jesus seeks, with a power that only he could call up, to comfort his grieving disciples. It is Jesus, as comforter, that I hear through every word Jesus speaks in John 14-17. If there are important and grand theological insights in these chapters, they play, for me, second fiddle. Jesus, the theologian, plays second fiddle to Jesus, concerned, caring, and committed friend.

Yes, imagine it. Jesus is more than a thinker and a teacher. He is a friend. “Ye are my friends” (Jn. 15.<sup>14</sup>), assures Jesus.

Above all the other roles he plays in my life—and they are innumerable—this is the one that I cherish above all: caring, comforting, and committed friend. So, whatever deep doctrines we might think we find in today’s reading, it is Jesus’ promise of comfort and presence that resonates most deeply in me. For I often require comfort. And I always need a friend. Yes,

“I need thee every hour,  
Most gracious Lord.  
No tender voice like thine  
Can peace afford.  
I need thee, oh, I need thee;  
Every hour I need thee!  
Oh, bless me now, my Savior;  
I come to thee!” (LDS Hymn 98, “I Need Thee Every Hour”)

One of the purposes of Lent is to allow us to acknowledge our need for him; to confess our need for him. It is a good time to seek the comfort that only he can give. It is also a good time to consider how we can follow his example and “comfort those that stand in need of comfort” (Mos. 18.<sup>9</sup>). Lent is a time to plead for his comforting presence and companionship in our lives and in the lives of others who are, like us, in desperate need of his comfort and presence.

“Abide with me...  
O Savior, stay this night with me;  
Behold, tis eventide.  
O Savior, stay this night with me;  
Behold, tis eventide” “Lone will be the night  
If I cannot commune with thee  
Nor find in thee my light  
The darkness of the world, I fear,  
Would in my home abide” (LDS Hymn #165, “Abide with Me; ‘Tis Eventide).

Even so come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: march 19, 2024)*

## **J**ohn 15.<sup>4-5</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. <sup>5</sup>I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

### **m**editation

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I recently read the following well-known passage from the Gospel of John.

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.”<sup>1</sup>

As I read, one of my favorite quotes from Lorenzo Snow came to mind.

“The character of the religion that we have espoused demands a certain course of conduct that no other religion that we know of requires of its adherents...”

We might all stop at this point and nod our heads in agreement. A great deal is asked of us. And we make many demands upon ourselves. As we nod in agreement, we might either smile or frown, depending upon how we feel about our ability to measure up to the expectations. In our spiritual immaturity and arrogance, we might also look down our noses at those of other faiths, who, we claim, rightly or wrongly, do not have the expectations that we do.

Let’s read it again and then read on.

“The character of the religion that we have espoused demands a certain course of conduct that no other religion that we know of requires of its adherents; and the nature of those demands upon us are such that no person can comply with them...”

Anyone surprised by this startling claim? So much is asked of us that, in fact, no one can measure up? Maybe we should read again and read on once more.

“The character of the religion that we have espoused demands a certain course of conduct that no other religion that we know of requires of its adherents; and the nature of those demands upon us are such that no person can comply with them unless by assistance from the Almighty... the sacrifices that are required of us are of that nature that no man nor woman could make them, unless aided by a supernatural power; and the Lord, in proposing these conditions, never intended that his people should ever be required to comply with them unless by supernatural aid... He has promised this aid.”<sup>2</sup>

We were not sent here to feel, and in fact be “self-sufficient.” In forming His plan of salvation, it never entered the mind of God that we achieve salvation on our own and through our own abilities, skills, and gifts. We were always meant to humbly accept our weaknesses, our inabilities, our inadequacies, and our limitations. We were always meant to acknowledge that, in and of ourselves, we are faint, grow weary, and lack “might.”

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<sup>1</sup> John 15.<sup>4-5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *JD*. Vol. 20, p. 362

But neither was it ever intended that we would focus on this reality. It was never intended that we become stymied or discouraged by such truths. Rather, we were to remember always that HE is never faint. HE is never weary. HE is never put off or weakened by our inadequacies. HE gives no thought whatsoever to our weakness and lack of might, except to be prepared to lend us his inexhaustible strength—to provide us the much needed “supernatural aid.” He only asks that we wait, or hope and trust in His ability and His earnest desire to strengthen us and bring us good success. As we do so, we feel our faintness, our weariness, our lack of might melt away. We feel our weaknesses become strengths. Indeed

We mount up with wings as eagles;  
We run, and are not weary;  
We walk, and are not faint.

With Paul we faithfully acknowledge one of the surest truths of life:

“[We] can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”<sup>3</sup>

This reality of our need, our dependence upon God is one of the lessons we were sent to earth to learn. The acknowledgement of this truth is one of the tests of life. The understanding that all beings, mortal and immortal depend upon others, depend upon each other is one required of those who would live in peace and power with others in time and in eternity. The fact is, God is God, not because He is an independent Being, but because He acknowledges the need and acts upon the need to be connected to others. He isn't God because He is “separate,” but because He is ONE—linked to others for the good and happiness of all, including Himself.

Even so, Come, Lord Jesus!

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<sup>3</sup> Phil. 4:<sup>13</sup>

## **John 18.** <sup>15- 18, 25-26</sup>

<sup>15</sup>And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest. <sup>16</sup>But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter. <sup>17</sup>Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, “Art not thou also one of this man’s disciples?”

He saith, “I am not.”

<sup>18</sup>And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold: and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself...

<sup>25</sup>And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. They said therefore unto him, “Art not thou also one of his disciples?”

He denied it, and said, “I am not.”

<sup>26</sup>One of the servants of the high priest, being his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off, saith, “Did not I see thee in the garden with him?”

Peter then denied again: and immediately the cock crew.

### **m**editation

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While the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) often overlap, reporting the same events, the Gospel of John overlaps and repeats what the other three Gospels report far, far less often. Peter’s denial of Jesus is one of those few events that is reported in all four Gospels. All four report that Peter denied knowing Jesus, not once, not twice, but three times.

One fully understands the first denial. We can easily imagine Peter being caught off guard. The second and then third are more difficult. Peter has plenty of time to think about things and how he will respond to the moment. Even with time to consider, Peter repeatedly denies. With the third, we cannot escape the fact that his denial is thought out and premeditated.

Of the four Gospels, Luke seems to go easiest on Peter. That said, only Luke reports that after Peter’s third denial, “the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter.” Looking into Jesus’ eyes in that moment must have been brutal for Peter. We can easily understand why he “went out, and wept bitterly.”<sup>1</sup>

Matthew and Mark do not hold back in reporting Peter’s denial. Here too, Peter’s first denial can, it seems, be explained by surprise, confusion, and unpreparedness. When a lowly female servant observed that Peter had traveled with Jesus in Galilee, Peter responded, “I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest.”<sup>2</sup> But his second and third denials were intense and seem to have come with thought behind them. Matthew reports that with his second denial, Peter resorted to religious language, denying “with an oath”<sup>3</sup> his knowledge of and association with Jesus. When that failed to turn suspicion from him, he resorted to profanity as part of his final denial: “Then began he to curse and to swear.”<sup>4</sup> In the end, Peter’s denial of Jesus is intense. There is nothing accidental or haphazard about it.

What about John? How does he deal with Peter’s undeniable denials. At first glance, he seems to follow Luke in going easy on Peter. Whereas in the three synoptic Gospels, Peter is constantly facing

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 22.<sup>61-62</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Mark 14.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 26.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 26.<sup>74</sup> and Mark 14.<sup>71</sup>

challenging and threatening accusations about his association with Jesus, in John query takes the place of accusation. No doubt the queries contained an element of suspicion. Nevertheless, John seems to tone down the threat. The insignificant female servant asked, “Art not thou also one of this man’s disciples?” “I am not,” he answered simply. Those who stood with him around a fire asked, “Art not thou also one of his disciples?” “I am not,” he replied again. Finally, an assistant to the High Priest asked, “Did not I see thee in the garden with him?” This question was more fraught with danger, as the questioner was also a relative to the man Peter had assaulted in the Garden of Gethsemane. “Peter,” John informs us simply, “denied again.” Overall, the threat to Peter seems less in John than in the other Gospels. Still, Peter denies knowing or associating with Jesus.

John does possess one unique feature that seems worth examining. John joins Mark in reporting that during the evening Peter was found warming himself near a fire. Neither Matthew nor Luke mentions this detail. In Mark, Peter was simply “warming himself.” Peter could have been, for all we know, all by himself. In John, however, we are informed that Peter was not alone. “Servants and officers... who had made a fire of coals” “stood there.” “And Peter stood with them.”

“And Peter stood with them.”

Now, we can read of Peter’s warming himself as simple meteorological data—it was cold. We can read of his standing by the fire right along with everyone else as simply locational and indicative of the human need for warmth. But, might there be more to it? Might John be sending a message? Is it possible that in reporting how Peter warmed himself just like everyone else and stood right along “with them” John would have us understand that Peter had much closer affinity to those present at Jesus’ trial than to Jesus? Peter was more like everyone else and less like Jesus. He wasn’t, after all standing with Jesus, but with “servants and officers.”

Throughout his narrative of Jesus’ passion—arrest, trial, crucifixion—as, indeed, throughout his Gospel, John always seems to portray Jesus as standing apart and above everyone else. He is ever and always superior. These were some of his earliest and most oft repeated words about Jesus:

“This was he of whom I spake, ‘He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.’”<sup>5</sup>

“He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe’s latchet I am not worthy to unloose.”<sup>6</sup>

“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, ‘After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me.’”<sup>7</sup>

In vision, the Book of Mormon’s Lehi saw Jesus as “One descending out of the midst of heaven.” “His luster was above that of the sun at noon day.” In that same vision, he saw “twelve others following him.” Their “brightness,” he tells us “did exceed that of the stars in the firmament.”<sup>8</sup> Now, however bright the night stars might be, the light they shed upon the earth is no where near comparing to the light that the noon-day sun shines on earth. The twelve may accompany Jesus, but they are not to be compared to him. They are far more different from him than they are similar.

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<sup>5</sup> John 1.<sup>15-17</sup>

<sup>6</sup> John 1.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>7</sup> John 1.<sup>29-30</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See 1 Nephi 1.<sup>9-10</sup>

Utilizing, apparently, an ancient Christian hymn, Paul proclaims the supremacy, the preeminence of Jesus, declaring, “that in all things he might have the preeminence.”<sup>9</sup> We could go on. And on. And on. We could make resort to the New Testament’s Book of Hebrews; the entire Book one long discourse on the supremacy of Christ—supreme over Moses, supreme over angels, supreme over high priests, supreme over every creature under heaven. Supreme. Supreme. Supreme.

So, perhaps, John reminds us as part of his narrative on Peter’s denial of Jesus that Peter is more like everyone else, including those who are questioning and prosecuting Jesus in hopes of killing him, than he is different from them. His “standing with them” is about more than merely warming human flesh. He stands with them in not understanding Jesus. He stands with them in being entirely unlike him.

Indeed, the same can be said for all of us. We all have far more in common with each other—the best of us having more in common with the worst of us—than we do with Jesus? And in our own and multiple ways, we all deny him. Peter was right, really, and speaking for all of us when he repeatedly confessed on that fateful night, “I do not know the man.”

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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<sup>9</sup> Colossians 1.<sup>18</sup>

## John 18.<sup>36</sup>

My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.”

### **m**editation

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It was in the beginning of my discontent. I do not remember what year it was, sometime in the early to mid-80s, I would say. LDS General Conference fell on Easter weekend. During the Sunday sessions, only passing mention was made of the importance of the day. I remember sitting there thinking: “What the heck?” Hardly fifteen minutes could pass without remembrance of and pledges of allegiance to the living prophet, but hardly one word in remembrance of the Savior or commemoration of the momentous event 2000 years earlier.

I don’t know how it was for you during 2023’s Easter sacrament service, but my ward made a valiant effort to commemorate Easter as the day deserves—and as it has deserved for the past two thousand years. There was much more music. That was good. Our ward has some mighty fine voices that delivered some mighty fine musical texts. And if you are interested in things like congregational engagement, music is fundamental.

Then there were the Scripture readings. Without commentary. Marvelous. Why scripture readings without commentary are not part of *every* service is one of the great mysteries of Mormonism, or Latter-day Saintism, if you prefer.

There was less of the *spoken* word. Hallelujah! We could use a lot less of the spoken word in sacrament services. Whether it’s because the “speakers” lack the skill to keep the congregation engaged, or because the congregation lacks the ability to remain engaged, I don’t know. But congregational engagement during the spoken word is pathetic—no better than about 20% of the adults being engaged at any given moment. Either way, more of less spoken word would be much appreciated.

I will admit, however, that my appreciation for the service was tempered a bit when the final, and lone speaker openly confessed that the extra effort in conducting a more meaningful Easter service was the result of some supposed latter-day prophetic insight that Easter is actually important. I mean, come on! The importance of Easter has been blindingly obvious to any discerning believer for the past 2000 years. It ought not to require some latter-day prophetic revelation to understand the importance of Easter. The fact that the “Saints” required a latter-day prophetic oracle announcing the importance of Easter and “approval” for a more meaningful Easter service serves as sad reminder of the deep spiritual malaise that afflicts Latter-day Saintism. I mean its members can’t think or act on their own, but wait for direction that is rightfully theirs to obtain.

Still, though it was but a tiny step in the right direction, my ward gave it their all. Of course, those who planned the service still couldn’t bring themselves to fully acknowledge and embrace Jesus’ cross, the violence he suffered there, his violent death, or the revelation that the cross presents of the pervasiveness of human violence.

Now, I understand that Easter is the day of the Lord’s resurrection and that on that day we want to celebrate both the fact of his resurrection and the implication of our own resurrection. But we LDS folk do not do Lent, during which one considers, among other things, why we need atonement. Neither do we do any Holy Week celebration, including Good Friday services, during which we might, as Jacob admonishes, “view his death” (Jac. 1.8). So, a Mormon Easter must pull double, even



triple duty. It must address our spiritual death, Jesus' death by crucifixion, Jesus' resurrection, and the life Jesus returns to us. Otherwise, we are presented an Easter without context. To commemorate Jesus' rise from death without recalling his torturous death is like remembering someone's rescue without mention of what it was they were rescued from.

"Did you know that Charles was rescued?"

"Why, no! What happened? What was he rescued from?"

"Oh, don't bother with that. Just be glad he was rescued?"

Talk about an incomplete story!

I have discussed in previous homilies and meditations the foolishness of the Mormon aversion to the cross. But perhaps I have not discussed, as befits the subject, the cross and the revelation of human violence that it represents—especially violence committed against vulnerable and, often, innocent individuals. I will take this opportunity in this meditation to briefly touch upon that revelation. It is, perhaps, human violence—especially that committed against the vulnerable and innocent—and our willing complicity in it that keeps us from truthfully examining the cross and acknowledging the tremendous revelation it represents concerning the vileness of human violence. It is perhaps our complicity in violence against the vulnerable and innocent that keeps Jesus' death and cross out of Mormon theology and Easter services.

First, for a definition. We use the word, "violence," to indicate any force—either physical, emotional, or verbal—that is used to inflict harm, damage, injury, or death upon another. The practitioner of violence is nearly always in some way superior to his target—the legislator or jurist with his ability to influence legislation or manipulate law, the wealthy using his money to appeal to the greed of others and influence attitudes and policies, the thief with his gun and the element of surprise it brings, the physical and emotional abuser with his superior physical strength or lack of empathy, etc. By the same token, the target of violence is nearly always possesses some pre-existing vulnerability to the perpetrator of violence.

According to the Gospel record, it was very early on in Jesus' earthly ministry that he revealed his conclusion about and his attitude toward violence (Mt. 5.<sup>38-41</sup>). While the entire world, "civilized" and "uncivilized" alike, accepted and lived, as it does today, by the rule of "eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," Jesus rejected it: "I say unto you, that ye resist not evil"—read "violence."

In offering his critique of human violence, he presented what were then three common examples of human violence (being smitten on the cheek, being sued in court, and being forced to carry a soldier's baggage), and suggested shockingly passive responses to that violence. The passive responses were to serve two purposes. First, the responses kept the violated from engaging in violence themselves and thus contributing to an ever-expanding spiral of violence. Just as importantly, the passive responses, it was hoped, would serve as revelation to the violator. The passive response would force the violator to have an honest look at the violence they perpetrated rather than the violence that came boomeranging back upon them. This revelation might lead to repentance and so less violence.

These examples remind us that the disciple is always to serve, first, not just as gospel messenger but as gospel message itself. The disciple is to sacrifice themselves, even their lives if necessary, in order to reveal the gospel to others and expand its influence. They are to live peaceable and exemplify the rejection of violence so that others might learn from them and follow their example.

None of this is easy, as Jesus himself best exemplifies. Nevertheless, Jesus practiced what he preached. He sensed well in advance how his life would end. He warned his clueless disciples repeatedly that he “must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed” (Mt. 16.<sup>21</sup>). Nevertheless, when the time came, his disciples, exemplified by Peter, were prepared to use violent means to stop his unjust arrest and the violence that was being perpetrated against him. Jesus, however, would have none of it.

“Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?” (Mt. 26.<sup>50-54</sup>)

What “must be” was not simply his atoning death. It was his death absent his own violent resistance. He would not, could not violently resist lest he contribute to and propagate the false logic of violence. Heaven would not, could not violently resist lest it contribute to and propagate the false logic of violence. Jesus’ submission to the cross was intended as revelation of human violence, especially as perpetrated against the innocent, and the necessity for the people of God to reject that violence.

Only a few hours after rejecting the disciples’ use of force and violence, Jesus was once more under necessity of preaching and living his non-violent rejection of violence as he stood before Rome’s agent, Pilate. Hearing rumors, Pilate sought to understand if Jesus truly thought of himself as a king and, if so, what kind of king he imagined himself to be and what kind of kingdom he envisioned. Jesus answered,

“My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence” (see Jn. 18.<sup>33-37</sup>).

Now, one can imagine any number of descriptions that Jesus might have given of his kingship and kingdom. But he settled on this one. “My kingdom does not use violence as the kingdoms of this world do.” Again, this serves to remind us that his own violent death was to reveal the senselessness of violence.

If Jesus thought to transform Pilate and deliver himself from his violent death through this instruction, he was disappointed. Jesus died as violent and grotesque a death as the kingdoms of this world had devised. In suffering the cross, Jesus revealed to the world how utterly serious he was when he had taught his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount that they not “resist evil.” In addition, the cross became a symbol of this world’s violence, especially its violence against vulnerable and innocent victims.

This revelation concerning violence has to be part of Easter celebrations—if not in the days leading up to Easter, then on Easter itself. The world needs this revelation. American Christianity needs this revelation. Mormonism needs this revelation. The Christian Easter, like the Jewish Passover with which it is historically so intimately connected, is the time above all other times to consider the violence we do. For example, American Christians might have used Easter 2023 to reconsider and repent of the current wave of ugly and vile violence that they are perpetrating against the LGBTQ community. It might have used Easter to reconsider and repent of its historic and ongoing violence against African Americans. It might have used Easter to reconsider and repent of its growing anti-Semitic violence against American Jews.

This reconsideration and repentance is not easy. It requires honest introspection. It requires an honest

look at the world we have created. It requires, as Jesus exemplified, self-sacrifice, often painful and humiliating. And it begins with Jesus' revelation on and from the cross.

But, alas, at least among the Mormons with whom I associate, Easter passed without a true look at all its meanings and revelations. Another Easter passed without a truthful look at the violence we do or the call that Jesus issued from the cross that we repent of it ourselves and act as the kind of revelation to others that is necessary for their repentance. Perhaps next year, as Jews say in concluding Passover. Perhaps during Easter 2024, we can add this to the enhanced music, the added scripture readings, and the reduced spoken word of Easter 2023—all a good first step in what looks to be a very long journey.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## John 18.<sup>38-40</sup>

<sup>38</sup>...And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, "I find in him no fault at all." <sup>39</sup>But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews?"

<sup>40</sup>Then cried they all again, saying, "Not this man, but Barabbas."

Now Barabbas was a robber.

## meditation

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It ought to be abundantly clear that the entire MAGA movement with its messianic expectations of tRUMP is a cult. It is an American Christian heresy of epic and historic proportions. One for the history books. This was brought home to me again this week as I have prepared for the holiest week of the Christian calendar in lead up to its holiest holiday, Easter.

As I scanned through my Twitter feed, I was jolted by this tweet from an ardent supporter of one of the greatest con artists; one of the most committed and consistent criminals; to one of the most immoral individuals in American history:

"Jesus was arrested Easter week. Trump will be arrested Easter Week."

I am not making this up. It is beyond my humble ability to make up something so grotesque and blasphemous. To call it grotesque and blasphemous is an understatement of gargantuan proportions. I cannot begin to say how repulsed and disgusted I am at such heresy and blasphemy—or, if I can say, I dare not, lest I issue forth with the most offensive profanity I can string together.

I thought of this grotesquery as I read the passage above. It is part and parcel of antisemitism's hateful doctrine that Jews are fair game for violence because they killed Jesus. And, when given a chance, they sacrificed him in order to deliver a thief and gangster. But our blasphemous Tweeter reminds us just how complicit are we all—Jew, Christian, atheist, etc., etc.—in Jesus' death.

Tragically, and destructively, this blasphemous Tweeter has done as the multitude did all those years ago. He has chosen a criminal over Jesus. But, far different than that multitude of long ago, who probably did not know the criminal before and never heard of or saw him again, this Twitting blasphemer has followed and intends to follow this American criminal to the bitter end—and the end will be bitter.

Yes, this ungodly blasphemer has shouted aloud from his rooftop; sent it out for all the world to hear: "Crucify him. Crucify Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God, the Holiest and Kindest and most Faithful of friends." In choosing to follow this American criminal, he with his fellow MAGA heretics crucify Jesus anew.

Such Tweets as this MAGA Tweeter's convinces one that the Lord was within His rights when He warned that "the wrath of God shall be poured out upon the wicked *without measure*."<sup>1</sup> What punishment can be deemed to severe for such blasphemers? How long can it be before the Romans come and burn down all the Christian churches and temples? If things continue as they are, it can't come too soon or too fast or too brutal as far as I am concerned. I am beyond the point of praying for the MAGA mob. They are past feeling, it seems. I pray against them.

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<sup>1</sup> DC 1.<sup>9</sup>

*O God, how long shall the adversary reproach?  
shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever?<sup>2</sup>*

*Break thou the arm of the wicked and the evil man:  
seek out his wickedness till thou find none.<sup>3</sup>*

*Break his teeth, O God, in his mouth:  
break out the great teeth of the young lions, O LORD.*

*As a snail which melteth, let him pass away:  
like the untimely birth of a woman, that he may not see the sun.<sup>4</sup>*

*Let him be as chaff before the wind:  
and let the angel of the LORD chase him.  
Let his way be dark and slippery:  
and let the angel of the LORD persecute him.<sup>5</sup>*

*As smoke is driven away,  
so drive him away:  
as wax melteth before the fire,  
so let the wicked perish at the presence of God.<sup>6</sup>*

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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<sup>2</sup> Psalm 74.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 10.<sup>3-7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 58.<sup>6, 8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 35.<sup>5-6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 68.<sup>2</sup>