

New Zealand Local Pages

The Power of the Sacrament

By Elder James J. Hamula, Area President

Too many of us fail to appreciate the power and importance of the sacrament that is offered to us each week in sacrament meeting. The sacrament makes available to each of us the cleansing power of the Lord's redeeming sacrifice. If this were better appreciated, there would be no ocean too large, no desert too hot, no storm too intense—in short, no circumstance too difficult—to keep us from earnestly participating in the sacrament ordinance each week.

To understand the power and importance of the sacrament, we must first reflect on our Father's plan of salvation. The plan of salvation is premised on the doctrine that God is our Father. That makes us His children. We lived with Him before we came here. We will return to Him when our time here is over. Our return to God our Father is assured by His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ. All men return to the presence of God by the power of the Resurrection. While resurrection includes the reuniting of body and spirit after death, it also reunites man

with God. Significantly, no one is outside the reach of the Resurrection. It applies to all—both old and young, male and female, wicked and righteous.

The universality of the Resurrection—wonderful a gift as it is—presents us with a profound problem. The problem is that, after the experience of mortality, no one is clean. All have acted, thought, and said unclean things. All have been or done less than what they should have been or done. Herein lies the problem. If we return to the presence of God in an unclean condition, we cannot stay with Him. While unclean beings may *return* to the presence of God, no unclean being can *dwell*, or *remain*, with Him. If we return to the presence of God unclean, we will have to turn away, and will never be able to return. Knowing this, every messenger from heaven declares, with urgency and fervor, that we need to prepare to meet our God.

How do we properly prepare to meet God? On our own, we cannot. We are all unclean and therefore do not have the means, among ourselves, to clean

ourselves. One unclean person cannot make another unclean person clean. Only a clean person can make an unclean person clean. This is why only Jesus Christ, the only one to walk through this world without sin, is capable of making us clean.

He removes from us the stain of sin and transgression on four conditions.

First, we must come to Him with faith that He and only He can make us clean.

Second, we must repent of our sins, which means that we must turn from our own ways and make God's ways our ways.

Third, we must publicly demonstrate our commitment to walk after the Lord Jesus Christ by being baptized in His name.

And fourth, we must receive the Holy Ghost, which sanctifies us, or makes us clean.

These four steps—faith, repentance, baptism, and receiving the Holy Ghost—constitute the “gospel” (see 3 Nephi 27:19–21). The gospel, or good news,



Elder James J. Hamula

is that if man has faith in Christ, repents of his sins, is baptized in His name, and receives the Holy Ghost, he will be made clean through the grace, mercy and merits of Jesus Christ and may remain with the Father at the last day.

Once we are baptized and have received the Holy Ghost, however, we must press on and keep ourselves clean (see 2 Nephi 31). Yet, our Father knows that we will make mistakes and commit sins after baptism. What can we do then to be made clean again? We must repent again and participate in another ordinance, which promises us sanctification through renewal of the Holy Ghost. This ordinance is the sacrament.

Think of the significance of this ordinance! A 16- or 17-year-old priest, sitting at the sacrament table, in the power of his Aaronic Priesthood office, and in the name of Jesus Christ, blesses and sanctifies, not the bread or the water, but the souls of all those who partake of the bread and water, in remembrance of Christ and with commitment again to keep His commandments (see D&C 20:77, 79). To the earnest, penitent participant in the sacrament ordinance, that priest promises the return of the Holy Ghost, which is the agent that sanctifies and makes one

clean again. That priest makes available to all who receive the sacrament in the proper spirit, the redeeming power of Jesus Christ. Week after week, this sacred ordinance is offered to us, and if we receive it in the spirit in which it is offered, we are sanctified, or made clean, little by little, grace for grace, until the perfect day. Only by enduring to the end in this manner will we qualify ourselves to stand in the presence of God in the day of resurrection.

Brothers and sisters, all of us must be changed, or we cannot remain with our Father when we are returned to Him. Yea, “all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters; . . . and unless they do this they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God” (Mosiah 27:25–26). Change means conversion—conversion from what we are now to what we need to be to remain with our Heavenly Father in the Day of Judgment. And such conversion, or change, occurs only as we receive the saving ordinances and keep the associated covenants, which include baptism,

priesthood ordination for men, temple endowment, temple sealing, and the sacrament.

We must understand, brothers and sisters, that in the ordinances of the priesthood there is a power to change us, if we are willing to receive such power. As the Lord told Joseph Smith, “in the ordinances [of the priesthood], the power of godliness is manifest. And without the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh; For without this no man can see the face of God, even the Father and live” (D&C 84:20–22). What is the power of godliness in the ordinances? Among other things, the power of godliness is the power to change us into beings that can live with, and like, God our Father and His Son. Such power is made available to us through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ and through the receiving of ordinances and the keeping of covenants delivered in His name—including the sacrament.

It is my prayer that we may all sing the sacrament hymns (which are prayers unto God) more earnestly and participate in the sacrament ordinance more thoughtfully and penitently, that we may come unto Christ, grace for grace, until the perfect day. ■

Master's Degree Project Will Be a Great Missionary Tool

As a missionary serving in the Spanish-speaking programme of the Florida Tampa Mission, Rachel Tui Smith developed a love for languages. Like most foreign-speaking missionaries, she also taught English classes as a service to the community, to build missionary contacts, and to create a presence in the areas where she served. She realised that while missionaries had good hearts and were motivated to serve and teach the English language to the local community, they didn't always have high quality materials or lesson plans that were relevant, and some missionaries didn't know how to teach English as a second language.

With this in mind, after graduating from BYU-Hawaii with a BA in TESOL and linguistics, Rachel presented a project plan designed to help missionaries who teach English, to the graduate board of BYU-Provo as part of her application for the master's programme of TESOL and linguistics. She was one of only a handful of students worldwide to be accepted into the programme this year. She has also been awarded a departmental scholarship which will cover half of her tuition.

"Missionary work is so important," Rachel said. "The prophets have said that it is the lifeblood of the Church. We have a responsibility to use our talents wherever we are to bless people's lives. Teaching languages is a blessing to share, and I'm really excited to help the missionary language programme benefit from this project I am developing as part of my study."

Rachel would like to develop high quality materials and resources (including a website) that are gospel centred to enable missionaries to teach quality ESL (English as a second language) within their local communities whilst still staying

dedicated to missionary work. She explains, "The benefits that this project will produce include those necessary resources, with the assurance that the missionary teacher saves time, saves money and finds the right balance between being a focussed missionary and a top quality ESL teacher." Rachel is hoping, once her project is completed, that it will be endorsed as an approved Church programme through the Missionary Department, as well as being beneficial for other Christian organizations who teach as part of humanitarian or volunteer work worldwide.

Rachel continues, "I have a great testimony of the Saviour. This is His Church, this is His gospel, and He desires for us to continually improve and progress. Seminary, institute, daily personal scripture study, and attending school will all help to build our education. The Lord desires that we be well developed and refined in all aspects of our lives. I believe continually seeking learning and growth in education is a blessing. If the opportunity comes up, as this has for me, we should make the most of it. The Lord loves His children very much. He loves it when we strive to use our knowledge and talents to build up His kingdom, and He greatly blesses our efforts." ■

Rachel Tui Smith at her graduation from BYU-Hawaii.



IMAGE COURTESY OF RACHEL TUI SMITH

Junior Tall Fern Firmly Grounded in the Gospel

By Melody Salmon

Camece Salmon, a Laurel from the Titahi Bay Ward of the Porirua New Zealand Stake, has been fortunate to grow up with basketball around her. She is the second oldest of five



IMAGE COURTESY OF BENNA SEVEAU

Camece Salmon was selected to play for the NZ Junior Tall Ferns basketball team, even though the selectors knew she wouldn't play on Sunday.

children. All of her family play basketball; her older sister Jasana represented New Zealand in 2010 as part of the NZ Junior Tall Ferns. Living near the chapel, she grew up like many of her cousins, learning the game on the chapel court. "It's what you do around here," she said. "We go to the chapel and shoot around."

It has certainly paid off. Camece was approached by the coach of the NZ Junior Tall Ferns at a tournament, who invited her to attend the final Junior Tall Fern selection camp in January this year. Camece took up the invitation, and went there without any expectations. The 6-foot, 1-inch Laurel had only one day to impress the selectors at the selection camp held over a weekend. Being the only Latter-day Saint athlete to trial, she needed to make an impression on Saturday, the first day of the camp, as she doesn't play sport on Sunday.

Camece said, "Attending early-morning seminary, where I have received an appreciation for the scriptures and saying my personal prayers, has helped strengthen my testimony and increase my faith in Jesus Christ. Even knowing that Sunday was a crucial day in the selection process, it was an easy choice for me. I had one day to give it heaps, and I thought I did all right," she said. The selectors thought so too, and Camece received a letter a few days later saying she had been chosen for the New Zealand Junior Tall Ferns team.

Following a tour of China in April, where they competed against under-19 teams from China, Japan and South Korea, the NZ Junior Tall Ferns will go head-to-head against Australia in a three-match series in September, to contest a place in the FIBA World Under-19 Championship next year in Greece.

As she prepares to compete in the qualification games, Camece is mindful of what is really

important, and says, “I’m grateful to know that I can call on Heavenly Father for His guidance and counsel while I am travelling overseas. If I apply my favourite scripture, Alma 37:37, and ‘counsel with the Lord in all [my] doings,’ He will direct me for good. I’m very grateful that I have this opportunity, to not only represent New Zealand in these tournaments, but to be an ambassador for the Church. My teammates know that I’m a Mormon, and some have asked questions about the Church. Hopefully I’ll be able to do some missionary work as well.” ■

Celestial University

By Kathryn Pierre

In February 2012, the sisters of the Titahi Bay Ward, in Porirua, enthusiastically turned out to enrol for “Celestial University”. They received a t-shirt upon registration, then signed up to earn a “bachelor’s degree” with the option to major in Religious Education, Business Management, Applied Art and Design, Health Education, Social Work, Food Technology, or Textile and Design.

Each area of focus had around 20 assignments. To earn a bachelor’s degree, sisters had to complete eight goals in their chosen major, five in the College of Religious Education, and one from every other discipline. A major course requirement was for each sister to present a project or lead an activity based on what she had learned, to share with the other sisters in a Relief Society meeting.

One of the organisers, Hayley Galo, shared some memories. “I can still recall the spirit of unity, diligence, perseverance and an overwhelming sense of accomplishment when as a young girl I saw sister after sister walk across the stage at our chapel with a blue sash on to receive



IMAGE COURTESY OF MELODY SALMON

Melody Salmon, Kathryn Pierre, and Hayley Galo enjoy their study at Celestial University.

diplomas in homemaking and other areas of learning”, she said. “I didn’t really understand what was going on at the time, but the memory held strong to this day. Fast-forward a few decades to our newly combined wards, and as the first counsellor in Relief Society, I was in charge of these meetings. My first thoughts were, now it’s my turn to walk across the stage and partake of the spirit of unity, accomplishment and perseverance, and [for all the sisters] to strive for excellence in all areas of our lives.”

Kathryn Pierre, second counsellor in the Relief Society presidency, said, “Our presentation was prayerfully and thoughtfully delivered by Hayley, and the excitement in the room soon became very contagious. It felt amazing to be among the women as they discussed what their majors would be. I felt inspired by all the women as they chose majors and began to set goals about the many things they would accomplish

this year. It is hard not to be enthused and inspired by diligent women setting righteous goals. Because of this inspired programme, I have achieved a half-marathon race!”

Her enthusiasm was echoed by the Titahi Bay Ward Relief Society president, Melody Salmon, who said, “One of the religious education goals in Celestial University is to read a Church book from cover to cover. As I read the biography of

Emma Smith, I was truly inspired and blessed to read of this elect woman. It has not only strengthened my testimony, but has inspired me to continue to read more inspirational books. Thank you, Celestial University!”

The growth and development doesn’t stop there; there is an option for motivated sisters to go on to achieve their “master’s degree” by completing extra assignments and goals. ■

A Change of Heart

By Catherine Vaughan

Being young, fit, and healthy, with an active lifestyle, it came as a shock to David Rich, a member of the Albany Ward, Auckland New Zealand Harbour Stake, to be told last year that he needed a heart transplant.

Brother Rich, his wife, Julie, and their five children moved to New Zealand from America six years ago and greatly enjoyed the outdoor lifestyle that they found here. Despite having a pacemaker implanted before he left the USA, Brother Rich was in good health, and he regularly played tennis, golf, and went camping and tramping with family and friends. As a lifelong member of the Church, he adhered to the Word of Wisdom and had never smoked, drunk alcohol, or used drugs.

Brother Rich said, “When we moved to New Zealand, I wanted to focus more of my time with my family and get a better church/work/family balance in my life. I’ve loved the opportunities here to spend more time with my children, play sports, travel, and get outside and enjoy life”.

During a golf game in December 2009, Brother Rich noticed tingling and numbness in his arm. The next morning when he tried to get out of bed, he found he had suffered a stroke. He was 41 years old. Though he recovered quickly, and the paralysis and difficulty with speech improved, it was an indication that something was not right. In September 2010 his health started to deteriorate rapidly. He was so nauseous he had lost 20 kg by

Christmas. The congestion on his lungs caused an irregular heartbeat, and his pacemaker/defibrillator kicked in on several occasions to regulate his heart rhythm.

Admitted to hospital in January last year as a result of congestive heart failure, the doctors identified that his heart had weakened to the point that he needed a heart transplant. He was on the transplant waiting list for three months and remained in hospital during this time.

“It was an emotional roller-coaster ride for me”, he said. “At first it was very difficult for me to accept that I needed a new heart, because I knew what it would mean for the donor and his or her family. My dad died when I was 14, so I knew exactly what type of grief they would have to go through. But I had to remind myself that the eventual donor wasn’t dying because of me”.



Elise, David, Garrett, Shaelyn, Katherine, Julie, and Coleson are grateful for the blessings and miracles they have received as a result of David's heart transplant.

In April last year, Brother Rich's health deteriorated further, and the outcome did not look good. After being home for two weeks, he was readmitted to hospital again to drain fluid from his lungs, but the

procedure wasn't helping. He was nearing the end, and the doctors didn't think he would last the week. He recalls, "I stayed as positive as I could for as long as possible, but the IV medication had

stopped working and I felt like I wasn't going to make it much longer. I had prayed to Heavenly Father to just make it end one way or the other. I finally stopped praying just to be kept alive, and asked for His

will to be done, whatever that might be. Within the hour the doctor came in and said that a heart had become available. Maybe when we search for God's will rather than our own and submit ourselves completely to it, things happen a little faster."

On the Thursday before Easter weekend in 2011, Brother Rich went into surgery and received his new heart. The operation was a success, and he was kept in a medically induced coma during Good Friday to enable his body to recuperate. The significance of receiving a new heart, and receiving a "new life" at Easter weekend was not lost on David, who says that the medical challenge has brought him much closer to Heavenly Father and has given him increased knowledge and deeper understanding of the closeness to family who have moved beyond the veil. He added, "They continue to be aware and concerned about us here on earth."

A year on from that momentous day, Brother Rich celebrated his "heart" anniversary by completing a half marathon on April 21, 2012, and took part in the Rotorua marathon at the end of April. He continues to see Heavenly Father's hand at work in his life, and

has had no trouble with organ rejection as he adjusts to living with the steady beat of his new heart. In fact, he has enjoyed a textbook recovery, so perfect and uneventful and so rare, that the transplant doctors have never seen anything like it before.

He is reminded of Ether 12:6, one of his favourite scriptures: "And now, I, Moroni, would speak somewhat concerning these things; I would show unto the world that faith is things which are hoped for and not seen; wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith." He says, "My faith was tested to an extreme and pushed to the limit. I'm grateful for this trial or challenge, because I don't think that I could have come closer to the Saviour or Heavenly Father any other way. Strangely enough, I miss that time in the hospital when I had all the time in the world to pray. I've never felt closer to Heavenly Father than I did at that point in time. Since that time, I've struggled to feel that same closeness, and I began wondering what I was doing wrong—I felt almost abandoned. Then I came to the conclusion that I wasn't being abandoned, I just wasn't

being 'carried' anymore."

The Rich family has been overwhelmed by the love and support they have received from everyone. "It was difficult for us to accept help initially, as we have never had to be on the receiving end," Brother Rich said. "It was a humbling experience to receive such love and support from our ward family, and it brings tears when I think of it. Our burden was truly lightened, thanks to our wonderful friends.

"I know that we may dislike challenges and trials in our lives. But they are nothing more than blessings from Heavenly Father", he continued. "I have been incredibly blessed. I know miracles still happen. They happen every day. I will thank Heavenly Father every day for the special gift given to me to allow me more time with my family here on earth. I value the time that I have with them, and I don't want to be wasting time doing things that don't matter. I'm grateful that this experience has helped me to focus on the important things in life—my family and my relationship with the Saviour. Just like Alma preached in the Book of Mormon, I have literally experienced a mighty 'change of heart' (Alma 5:26), and it has brought me closer to God." ■