



One by One: His Hands, His Touch

GREGORY PALMER

Department of Religious Education

Certainly He's trying to tell us something; the teaching has the emphasis of multiple witnesses:

Matthew 18:11-14 "How think ye? If a man have an hundred sheep, and *one* of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountain, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth... Even so, it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish." (Emphasis added.)

3 Nephi 11:14 and 15 "Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world. And it came to pass that the multitude went forth, and thrust their hands into his side, and did feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet; and this they did to, going forth *one by one* until they had all gone forth and did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands and did know of a surety and did bear record." (Emphasis added.)

3 Nephi 17: 21 and 22 "And when he had said these words, he wept, and the multitude bare record of it, and he took their little children, *one by one*, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them. And when he had done this he wept again;" (Emphasis added.)

Ether 3:6: "And it came to pass that when the brother of Jared had said these words, behold, the Lord stretched forth his hand and touched the stones *one by one* with his finger. And the veil was taken from off the eyes of the brother of Jared." (Emphasis added.)

"Even though multitudes followed after Him, [Christ's] ministry always consisted of blessing people *one by one*." (Carlos H. Amado, "Christ the Redeemer," General Conference, April 2014)

He whom God has chosen as prophet and presiding high priest for our day and time leaves meetings,¹ cares for the widow ² reaches for the one.

Those types of experiences that reach and that touch usually begin by seeing people differently; seeing them through the eyes of the Master. C. S. Lewis wrote:

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship... There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit... Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbour is the holiest object presented to your senses. ("The Weight of Glory," (1949) pp. 39-40.)

In our setting, it might help to imagine sartorially tragic leggings exchanged for celestial robes or too-stubby chins later celestially crowned.

Here is a story, my offering, representative of hundreds, probably thousands that happen across this campus: I saw Zach in the common area of the Austin, a place usually reserved for stressed-out engineers vectoring and whatnot. My heart recognized him before my mind did. I

knew instinctively that I liked him. I began to flip through the Rolodex in my mind—I couldn't find a name, but remembered I had him as a pre-missionary in Mission Prep, but recognized a more confident set to his countenance; he was now a returned missionary. I saw his eyes flash in recognition and a warm handshake quickly turned to one of those manly hugs.

This was Zach Bendixen. What I didn't remember then, some of which I wouldn't have known, was that in 2012 he was a struggling student, unsure, and foundering in his attendance. This is Zach's story in his words:

When you first met me about four years ago, I didn't really want to be here in Rexburg. I let my attitude affect my choices. I wasn't actively attending my classes. I would stay up late playing video games and watching TV, and I didn't go to church as often as I should have. I was wasting my time. I had roommates who were great at trying to get me to come to church and to help me to use my time effectively, but I honestly didn't want any of their help or anything to do with BYU-I. I was debating on whether or not to go on a mission, but I really didn't want to, but for some reason I decided to take a mission prep class. You happened to be my professor, but as I had done in past classes, I didn't show up for class. I didn't wake up on time to go to class at 9 am because I was always up so late. Instead of just leaving me to fail however, you went out of your way to get me to class because you wanted me there and knew that was where I needed to be. You treated me like the one lost sheep of the flock.

You reached out to me and invited me back to class. You, as the Savior does, told me it would not be easy for me after having missed so much to be able to pass the class, but promised me that if I did as you asked and was perfect in attendance from that point on that I would be able to pass the class. I ended up passing the class and learned so much from attending and feeling the spirit that was present in those discussions on missionary work and how we can prepare ourselves to be missionaries. I can't say that I was immediately changed and stopped making the mistakes that I had been making when I decided

to go to your class and to change, but it was a step, one that I had needed to get me closer to the path that I needed to be on. I am who I am today because of the love of my friends and family, those who didn't give up on me despite my wrong doings. If we are to reach out to the one, we need to do so in love. It's the small and little things that bring about great things. The little daily decisions determine our commitment to follow the Savior. I guess I could say the thing that has changed most about me has been my testimony of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the power of the atonement to enable us to become more like the Savior. (e-mail correspondence with the author, used with permission)

Zach went on to serve well as Elder's Quorum President in his campus ward.

CaraMia Schaefer, mother of some current BYU-Idaho students, tells of the reaching of her seminary teacher:

I grew up as an only child in a single parent, inactive home. In September of 1980, I was an incoming freshman at South High School. I was so excited to be a part of the released time seminary program! I was assigned to a wonderful, brand-new seminary teacher's class. I had no idea the impact this placement would have on my life. It wasn't long before I realized just how brightly "fate" had smiled upon me. The spirit in that classroom was tangible. The lessons were engaging and inspiring. My teacher had a testimony, a real one. And there was no doubt in any of our developing freshman minds that he loved the Savior. And exemplified Him. He knew all of our names almost instantly, and made us feel like we were all his most important student. We knew him and we loved him. He shared his life with us too. He got married and we rejoiced with him. He experienced a tremendous loss and we cried with him. He was the epitome of humanness and spirituality all rolled into one. He made living the gospel something we wanted to do, not something we had to do.

Then one day, he issued us a challenge, a challenge that I'm sure he knew, if we accepted, would be a turn key to our personal conversion. He asked us (in

a way only this wonderful, brand new teacher could ask), with sincere love and tenderness, to spend some time on our knees and to ask for our own witness to know if the church was true.

I thought a lot about that assignment. Believing and living the gospel had always come easy for me, but did I KNOW? For the first time in my life I actually asked the question, out loud, on my knees. “Heavenly Father, IS the church true?” I got in my bed and I waited. And I listened. It was dark and still in my room. Suddenly I was filled with a familiar feeling; the feeling that had often accompanied me in Primary and at Mutual and walking myself to church on Sundays; that happiness that radiated from my chest, out to the tips of my toes and fingers; that warmth of the Spirit. And I heard, “You already know.”

This wonderful, brand-new seminary teacher issued a challenge to his freshman class in 1980. Although there were many in that class, I was one of the fortunate ones to have been there. It didn’t feel like a group challenge. It was personal, just like the Savior would have done it. He taught the masses, yet reached the one. It changed my life. I am now married in the temple. I have three children who have also married in the temple. I have had the honor of sending three (soon to be four) missionaries into the field and have stayed the course of activity in the church. When I have doubts or feel uncertainty regarding the church, I remember that challenge, and that night perfectly. “You already know.” CaraMia Schaefer (e-mail correspondence with the author, used with permission)

There are principles in there: We must prepare diligently, invite the spirit, and inspire, consistent with our Mission Statement, deeper testimonies of the Restored Gospel.³ Those are bedrock, but even with those essentials in place, not much seems to happen without a personal caring⁴ being communicated. And then there should certainly be the extension of the challenge to act, whether that’s to gain a testimony or to get an “A” on an Anatomy and Physiology test.

Elder Richard G. Scott (1929-2015) always admonished us to write down the revelations the Lord gives us. He shared the story of receiving revelation during the rough-hewn lesson of a humble priesthood teacher in Mexico.⁵ As an addendum to the story, a friend told me of Elder Scott visiting his home sacrament meeting, telling that story, and commenting that one of the notes he made from that day is, “It isn’t about you, Richard.” Think of it. One of fifteen such men in the entire world recognized that heavenly dependence. We too must recognize the joy of being made an instrument in His hands,⁶ and that when a difference is made, eyes are opened, a heart is touched, it’s always Him doing the reaching.

But what joy to be used by Him. I believe that is what He would have us do here in this amazing place. It may well be why we and the students are here, guided by His hand.

1. It may be wise not to begin to enumerate, but here’s one to start, “The Faith of A Child,” Ensign, November 1975

2. Even harder! Let’s start with (“Thomas S. Monson, man of action, man of faith; always on the Lord’s errand,” Ensign, February 1986): “When he later became bishop of that very Sixth-Seventh Ward into which he had been born and raised, he had 1,060 members, including some 85 widows and the largest welfare load in the Church.

Many may know that young Bishop Monson took a week of his personal vacation time every Christmas season to visit all of those eighty-five widows in his ward. Many may not know that for the first several years the gift he would take them was one of the Barred Plymouth Rock or Rhode Island Red hens raised and dressed out by him in his own poultry coops. And although it has been more than thirty years since he was released as their bishop, President Monson has taken a gift and visited every one of those widows every Christmas for as long as each has lived. Some in their final moments have spoken to family members of where he stood in the room and what he said and how very much they loved him.”

3. See “Attributes and Approaches of Effective Gospel Teachers,” Religious Educator, Kendel Christensen and Lloyd D. Newell, Vol 13, no 2, 2012, 89

4. “caring” in one form or another shows up as an attribute of effective teachers with impressive frequency in much of the literature on the scholarship of teaching, including Barbara E. Walvoord’s fine work, *Teaching and Learning in College Introductory Courses* (Blackwell Publishing, 2008)

5. “I vividly recall how a humble Mexican priesthood leader struggled to communicate the truths of the gospel in his lesson material. I noted the intense desire he had to share those principles he strongly valued with his quorum members. He recognized that they were of great worth to the brethren present. In his manner, there was an evidence of a pure love of the Savior and love of those he taught. “His sincerity, purity of intent, and love permitted a spiritual strength to envelop the room. I was deeply touched. Then I began to receive personal impressions as an extension of the principles taught by that humble instructor. They were personal and related to my assignments in the area. They came in answer to my prolonged, prayerful efforts to learn. “As each impression came, I carefully wrote it down. In the process, I was given precious truths that I greatly needed in order to be a more effective servant of the Lord.” (Richard G. Scott, “To Acquire Spiritual Guidance,” Ensign, Nov. 2009, 7)

6. (See Mosiah 23:10, Mosiah 27:36, Alma 17:11, Alma 26:13, Alma 29:9, Alma 35:14).