

ABOVE ALL THINGS...

David Pulsipher—Editor

Nine years ago, my wife and I bought a small gray home a few blocks from campus. For two weeks, before I moved my family to Rexburg, I lived at the house, sleeping on a cot, painting walls and trim from first light to dusk. Each day a new face emerged through the open door—a small but steady stream of strangers bearing gifts. One morning a blue-eyed child brought me a plate of hot pancakes and a cup of orange juice. Another evening a lilting Welsh voice offered a small bowl of fresh-picked raspberries. There was a neighbor who arrived one afternoon with a paint roller and arms long enough to reach the top corners of the bathroom cupboard. Yet another startled me with the roar of his lawnmower as he trimmed a lawn grown deep from my neglect. Each night I called my wife with stories of new gifts. “What is this place?” she finally asked. “Are we moving to Zion?” “I don’t know,” I said. “But it may be the nearest I’ve ever seen.”

A few months later I stood on the plaza outside the McKay library listening to a friend describe her frustration with the Rexburg community. She worried about her children. The contrast between faith and unbelief was more stark in Florida, where she had recently lived. She longed for a place where Mormons were a minority. She missed the clarity of choice such a situation afforded her teenage children. I listened sympathetically, understanding the dynamic she was articulating. “Yes,” I said. “But think of the opportunity *this* place provides. Some things can only be accomplished by a concentration of saints, and one of those is the full vision of Zion. That is the challenge and possibility this community offers us.”

The vision of Zion and the core organizing principles—unity and love—around which it is organized have inspired, and ultimately eluded, me from my youth. But they constantly beckon, and they led me here. On *this* campus and in *this* community I sense the gap between sublime ideal and imperfect reality, while certainly still wide, is narrower than in other communities I have known. In an increasingly impersonal world, enraptured with atomizing individualism and freedom from restraint, the trend directs us away from unity, away from love. But here, thankfully, we struggle against such centrifugal forces to incrementally but steadily close the gap.

Love and unity are central to the Lord’s educational designs, as described in his instructions for the School of the Prophets:

And I give unto you a commandment that you shall teach one another...and let not all be spokesmen at once; but let one speak at a time and let all listen

unto his sayings, that when all have spoken that all may be edified of all, and that every man may have an equal privilege... And above all things, clothe yourselves with the bond of charity, as with a mantle, which is the bond of perfectness and peace. (Doctrine and Covenants 88:77, 122, & 125)

As I struggle to love, to listen, to speak, and to unite my soul with other employees and with my students, I am inspired by President Clark’s vision of this campus as “a place of safety where students and faculty [and, I would add, staff and administration] can venture out to the edge of what they know and beyond...a place where charity prevails.”¹ As I venture toward that edge, I find myself increasingly inspired by the loving gifts of my fellow laborers.

The articles that follow are examples of such remarkable seeds of love. From Stephen George’s stirring call for faculty research to Scott Franson’s extraordinary doodles, I draw strength and courage from consistent calls to higher, more consecrated, more pure efforts at learning, teaching, and communicating. Vaun Waddell’s exploration of student freedom and accountability and Eugene Thompson’s journey of intellectual and pedagogical inquiry prod me to more strenuous exertions, more rigorous thought, more careful classroom structure. I am encouraged by their love for this campus, for the students, for the faculty, for the Lord. Like the strangers who crossed my threshold with paint-brushes and raspberries, it is this charity of the givers, this willingness of scholars to share, to speak, and to extend themselves in a spirit of unity that gives me the greatest hope that I might find similar strength and compassion in my own efforts. And so I dare to dream that the principles of Zion, now embodied in the individual lives of so many people on this campus, will someday find full and perfect expression in the BYU–Idaho community as a whole. ∞

NOTE

1. Kim B. Clark, “Teach One Another,” *Perspective* (Spring 2006): 42.