

Smiling Faces and Grateful Hearts

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Smil på læben og taknemmelige hjerter

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De Halvfjerds

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The greatness of our Saints in Africa becomes even more evident as they face life's challenges and the demands of a growing Church.

A little over a year ago, I was released from my assignment in the Presidency of the Seventy, a change announced here at general conference. Because my name was read near those of General Authorities becoming emeritus, many assumed I was also finishing my time of service. After the conference, I received numerous messages of gratitude and good wishes for my next phase in life. Some even offered to buy my house in North Salt Lake. It was nice to see that I would be missed and also to know we will not have trouble selling our home when I am done. But I am not there yet.

My new assignment took Monica and me to beautiful Africa, where the Church is flourishing. It has been a blessing to serve among the faithful Saints in the Africa South Area and witness the Lord's love for them. It's inspiring to see generational families of all backgrounds, including many successful and well-educated Church members, dedicating their time and talents to serve others.

At the same time, given the region's demographics, many people of modest means are joining the Church and transforming their lives through the blessings of tithing faithfulness and the educational opportunities offered by the Church. Programs such as Succeed in School, EnglishConnect, BYU-Pathway Worldwide, and the Perpetual Education Fund bless many lives, especially those of the rising generation.

President James E. Faust once stated, "It has

Storheden hos de hellige i Afrika bliver særligt tydelig, når de står over for livets prøvelser og kravene fra en voksende kirke.

For lidt over et år siden blev jeg afløst fra min kaldelse i De Halvfjerds' Præsidium, en ændring der blev annonceret her på generalkonferencen. Da mit navn blev nævnt lige efter de generalautoriteter, der fik emeritusstatus, antog mange, at min tid som generalautoritet også var ved vejs ende. Efter konferencen modtog jeg adskillige beskeder, der udtrykte taknemmelighed samt gode ønsker for den næste fase af mit liv. Nogle tilbød endda at købe mit hus i North Salt Lake. Det var rart at se, at jeg ville blive savnet, og betryggende at vide, at vi ikke vil få problemer med at sælge huset, når min tjeneste er slut. Men der er jeg ikke nået til endnu.

Min nye kaldelse førte Monica og mig til det smukke Afrika, hvor Kirken blomstrer. Det har været en velsignelse at tjene blandt de trofaste hellige i området Afrika Syd og være vidne til Herrens kærlighed til dem. Det er inspirerende at se flergenerationsfamilier fra alle baggrunde, herunder mange succesfulde og veluddannede kirkemedlemmer, der dedikerer deres tid og talenter til at tjene andre.

Samtidig, i lyset af områdets demografi, slutter mange mennesker med beskeden midler sig til Kirken og forvandler deres liv gennem velsignelserne ved trofast tiendebetaling og de uddannelsesmuligheder, Kirken tilbyder. Programmer som Få succes i skolen, EnglishConnect, BYU-Pathway Worldwide og den selvsupplerende uddannelsesfond velsigner mange liv, især blandt den opvoksende generation.

Præsident James E. Faust sagde engang: »Det

been said that this church does not necessarily attract great people but more often makes ordinary people great.”

The greatness of our Saints in Africa becomes even more evident as they face life’s challenges and the demands of a growing Church. They always approach it with a positive attitude. They embody well the well-known teaching from President Russell M. Nelson:

“The joy we feel has little to do with the circumstances of our lives and everything to do with the focus of our lives.

“When the focus of our lives is on God’s plan of salvation ... and Jesus Christ and His gospel, we can feel joy regardless of what is happening—or not happening—in our lives.”

They find joy despite their challenges. They have learned that our relationship with the Savior enables us to approach difficulties with smiling faces and grateful hearts.

Let me share some of my experiences with these faithful Saints who illustrate this principle, starting with Mozambique.

Mozambique

A few months ago, I presided over a stake conference for a one-year-old stake that already had 10 units. More than 2,000 people filled the small chapel and three tents that were set outside. The stake president is 31 years old, his wife is 26, and they have two small children. He leads this growing and challenging stake with no complaints—only a smiling face and a grateful heart.

In an interview with the patriarch, I learned that his wife was seriously ill, and he struggled to provide for her care. After addressing the issue with the stake president, we gave her a priesthood blessing. I inquired of the patriarch how many patriarchal blessings he gives on average.

“Eight to ten,” he said.

I asked, “Per month?”

He replied, “Per week!” I counseled him that doing that many per weekend was not wise.

“Elder Godoy,” he said, “they keep coming every week, including new members and many youths.” Again, no complaints—only a smiling face and a grateful heart.

After the Saturday evening session of stake conference, on my way to the hotel, I noticed

er blevet sagt, at denne kirke ikke nødvendigvis tiltrækker store personligheder, men oftere gør almindelige mennesker store.«

Storheden hos de hellige i Afrika bliver særligt tydelig, når de står over for livets prøvelser og kravene fra en voksende kirke. De møder dem altid med en positiv indstilling. De personificerer præsident Russell M. Nelsons velkendte undervisning:

»Den glæde, vi føler, har lidet at gøre med vores livsvilkår og alt at gøre med vores fokus i livet.

Når vi har fokus på Guds frelsesplan ... og Jesus Kristus og hans evangelium, kan vi føle glæde, uanset hvad der sker – eller ikke sker – i vores liv.«

De finder glæde trods deres udfordringer. De har lært, at vores forhold til Frelseren gør det muligt for os at møde vanskeligheder med et smil på læben og et taknemmeligt hjerte.

Lad mig dele nogle af mine oplevelser med disse trofaste hellige, der illustrerer dette princip, begyndende med Mozambique.

Mozambique

For et par måneder siden præsiderede jeg over en stavskonference for en ét år gammel stav, der allerede havde 10 enheder. Mere end 2.000 mennesker fyldte den lille kirkesal og tre telte, der var sat op udenfor. Stavspræsidenten er 31 år gammel, hans hustru er 26, og de har to små børn. Han leder denne voksende og udfordrende stav uden at klage – kun med et smil på læben og et taknemmeligt hjerte.

I et interview med patriarken fik jeg at vide, at hans kone var alvorligt syg, og det var udfordrende at sørge for hendes pleje. Efter at have drøftet sagen med stavspræsidenten gav vi hende en præstedømmevelsignelse. Jeg spurgte patriarken, hvor mange patriarkalske velsignelser han typisk giver.

»Otte til ti,« sagde han.

Jeg spurgte: »Om måneden?«

Han svarede: »Om ugen!« Jeg rådede ham til, at det ikke var klogt at give så mange hver weekend.

»Ældste Godoy,« sagde han, »de kommer hver uge, også nye medlemmer og mange unge.« Igen ingen klager – kun et smil på læben og et taknemmeligt hjerte.

Efter lørdagens aftenmøde til stavskonferencen bemærkede jeg på vej til hotellet, at folk køb-

people buying food along the road late at night. I asked my driver why they were doing it when it was so dark rather than during the day. He responded that they were working during the day to have the money to do it later.

“Oh, they were working today to eat tomorrow,” I said.

But he corrected me: “No, they were working during the day to eat tonight.” I had hoped our members might be in a better situation, but he confirmed that many faced similar challenges in that part of the country. The next morning, during our Sunday session and newly aware of their circumstances, I was even more moved by their smiling faces and grateful hearts.

Zambia

On the way to a Sunday meeting, the stake president and I saw a couple walking along the road with a baby and two small children. We stopped to offer them a ride. They were surprised and delighted. When I asked how far they needed to walk to the chapel, the father replied that it could take 45 minutes to an hour, depending on the children’s pace. They faced this journey back and forth, every Sunday, with no complaints—only smiling faces and grateful hearts.

Malawi

One Sunday before a stake conference, I visited two branches using public schools as meetinghouses. I was shocked by the humble and modest conditions of the buildings, which lacked even some basic amenities. As I met a few members there, I was ready to apologize for the inadequate conditions of their meetinghouse, but they were happy to have a nearby place to gather, avoiding the usual long walk. Again, there were no complaints—only smiling faces and grateful hearts.

Zimbabwe

Following a Saturday of leadership training, the stake president took me to Sunday services held in a rented house. There were 240 people in attendance. Then the bishop introduced 10 new members baptized that week. The congregation was spread across two small rooms, with some members also sitting outside the building, watching the meeting through windows and doors.

te mad langs vejen sent om aftenen. Jeg spurgte min chauffør, hvorfor de gjorde det, når det var så mørkt i stedet for om dagen. Han svarede, at de arbejdede om dagen for at have penge til at gøre det senere.

»Åh, de arbejdede i dag for at kunne spise i morgen,« sagde jeg.

Men han rettede mig: »Nej, de arbejdede i løbet af dagen for at kunne spise her til aften.« Jeg havde håbet, at vores medlemmer måske var i en bedre situation, men han bekræftede, at mange stod over for lignende udfordringer i den del af landet. Næste morgen, under vores søndagsmøde og med ny bevidsthed om deres omstændigheder, blev jeg endnu mere rørt over deres smil på læben og taknemmelige hjerter.

Zambia

På vej til et søndagsmøde så stavspræsidenten og jeg et par gå langs vejen med en baby og to små børn. Vi standsede for at tilbyde dem et lift. De blev overraskede og glade. Da jeg spurgte, hvor langt de skulle gå til kirken, svarede faderen, at det kunne tage 45 minutter til en time, afhængigt af børnenes tempo. De tog denne tur frem og tilbage hver søndag uden at klage – der var bare smil på læben og taknemmelige hjerter.

Malawi

En søndag før en stavskonference besøgte jeg to menigheder, der brugte offentlige skoler som forsamlingshuse. Jeg var rystet over de ydmyge og beskedne forhold i bygningerne, som manglede selv de mest basale faciliteter. Da jeg mødte et par medlemmer der, var jeg klar til at undskylde for de utilstrækkelige forhold i deres forsamlingshus, men de var glade for at have et sted i nærheden, hvor de kunne samles, så de undgik den sædvanlige lange gåtur. Igen var der ingen klager – kun smil på læben og taknemmelige hjerter.

Zimbabwe

Efter en lørdag med lederskabsoplæring tog stavspræsidenten mig med til søndagsmøderne, der blev afholdt i et lejet hus. Der var 240 mennesker til stede. Derefter præsenterede biskoppen 10 nye medlemmer, der var blevet døbt i løbet af ugen. Menigheden var fordelt i to små rum, og nogle medlemmer sad endda uden for bygningen og fulgte mødet gennem vinduer og døre. Igen

There were no complaints—only smiling faces and grateful hearts.

Lesotho

I visited this beautiful small country, also known as “the mountain kingdom,” to see a Church district preparing to become a stake. Following a Saturday of meetings, I attended Sunday services in one of their branches in a rented house. The sacramental room was overflowing, with people standing outside the door to participate. I told the branch president that he needed a bigger house. To my surprise, he informed me that this was only half of his membership. The other half would attend a second sacrament meeting after the second hour. Again, there were no complaints—only smiling faces and grateful hearts.

I returned to Lesotho later due to a fatal traffic accident involving several of our youth, already mentioned by Elder D. Todd Christofferson earlier. When I visited the families and leaders, I expected a somber atmosphere. Instead, I encountered strong and resilient Saints who were coping with the situation in an uplifting and inspiring way.

Mpho Aniciah Nku, 14, a surviving accident victim in this picture, illustrated it well in her own words: “Trust in Jesus and always look unto Him, because through Him you’ll find peace, and He will help you in the healing process.”

These are just a few examples where we see their positive attitude because they center their lives in the gospel of Jesus Christ. They know where to find help and hope.

The Savior’s Healing Power

Why can the Savior succor them and us in any circumstances of our lives? The answer can be found in the scriptures:

“And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind. ...

“... And he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, ... that he may know ... how to succor his people according to their infirmities.”

As Elder David A. Bednar taught, there is no physical pain, anguish, or weakness we can experience that the Savior does not know. “You and I in a moment of weakness may cry out, ‘No one understands [what I am going through]. ...’

var der ingen klager – kun smil på læben og taknemmelige hjerter.

Lesotho

Jeg besøgte dette smukke lille land, også kendt som »bjergkongeriget«, for at se et kirkedistrikt, der forberedte sig på at blive en stav. Efter en lørdag fyldt med møder deltog jeg i søndagsmøderne i en af deres grene i et lejet hus. Nadvermødelokalet var overfyldt, og folk stod uden for døren for at deltage. Jeg sagde til grenspræsidenten, at han havde brug for et større hus. Til min overraskelse fortalte han mig, at dette kun var halvdelen af hans medlemmer. Den anden halvdel ville deltage i et andet nadvermøde efter den anden time. Igen var der ingen klager – kun smil på læben og taknemmelige hjerter.

Jeg vendte senere tilbage til Lesotho på grund af en dødelig trafikulykke, der involverede flere af vores unge, som ældste D. Todd Christofferson allerede har nævnt tidligere. Da jeg besøgte familierne og lederne, forventede jeg en nedtrykt stemning. I stedet mødte jeg stærke og modstandsdygtige hellige, der håndterede situationen på en opløftende og inspirerende måde.

Mpho Aniciah Nku på 14 år, et overlevende offer for ulykken på dette billede, illustrerede det godt med sine egne ord: »Stol på Jesus og se altid hen til ham, for gennem ham finder du fred, og han vil hjælpe dig i helingsprocessen.«

Dette er blot nogle få eksempler, hvor vi ser deres positive indstilling, fordi de centrerer deres liv om Jesu Kristi evangelium. De ved, hvor de kan finde hjælp og håb.

Frelserens helende kraft

Hvorfor kan Frelseren hjælpe dem og os i alle livets omstændigheder? Svaret findes i skrifterne:

»Og han skal gå omkring og lide smerter og trængsler og fristelser af enhver art ...

Og han vil påtage sig deres skrøbeligheder, så hans indre kan fyldes med barmhjertighed ... så han ... kan vide, hvorledes han kan bistå sit folk, hvad angår deres skrøbeligheder.«

Som ældste David A. Bednar har sagt, findes der ingen fysisk smerte, lidelse eller svaghed, vi oplever, som Frelseren ikke kender. »I et øjeblik svaghed kan vi måske sige: »Ingen ved, hvordan det er. Ingen forstår det ...« Der er måske intet

No human being, perhaps, knows. But the Son of God perfectly knows and understands.” And why? Because “He felt and bore our burdens before we ever did.”

I conclude with my testimony of Christ’s words found in Matthew 11:

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

“For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Just like those Saints in Africa, I know this promise is true. It is true there, and it’s true everywhere. Of this I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

menneske, som forstår os. Men Guds Søn ved og forstår det fuldt ud.« Og hvorfor? Fordi »Han følte og bar vores byrder, inden vi selv gjorde det.«

Jeg vil afslutte med mit vidnesbyrd om Kristi ord, som de står i Matthæus 11:

»Kom til mig, alle I, som slider jer trætte og bærer tunge byrder, og jeg vil give jer hvile.

Tag mit åg på jer, og lær af mig, for jeg er sagtnodig og ydmyg af hjertet, så skal I finde hvile for jeres sjæle.

For mit åg er godt, og min byrde er let.«

Ligesom de hellige i Afrika ved jeg, at dette løfte er sandt. Det er sandt der, og det er sandt overalt. Jeg vidner om dette i Jesu Kristi navn. Amen.