

“Ye Are My Friends”

By Elder David L. Buckner
Of the Seventy

“Ninyi ni Marafiki Zangu”

Na Mzee David L. Buckner
Wa Sabini

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The Savior’s declaration “ye are my friends” is a clarion call to build higher and holier relationships among all of God’s children.

In a world filled with contention and division, where civil discourse has been replaced with judgment and scorn, and friendships are defined by -isms and -ities, I have come to know that there is a clear, simple, and divine example we can look to for unity, love, and belonging. That example is Jesus Christ. I testify that He is the great unifier.

We Are His Friends

In December of 1832, as “appearances of troubles among the nations” were becoming “more visible” than at any time since the organization of the Church, Latter-day Saint leaders in Kirtland, Ohio, gathered for a conference. They prayed “separately and vocally to the Lord to reveal his will unto [them].” In acknowledgement of the prayers of these faithful members during times of intense trouble, the Lord comforted them, addressing the Saints three times with two powerful words: “my friends.”

Jesus Christ has long called His faithful followers His friends. Fourteen times in the Doctrine and Covenants, the Savior uses the term friend to define a sacred and cherished relationship. I am not talking about the word friends as the world defines it—subject to social media followers or “likes.” It cannot be captured in a hashtag or a number on Instagram or X.

Tangazo la Mwokozi “ninyi ni marafiki zangu” ni wito wa wazi wa kujenga mahusiano ya juu na matakatifu miongoni mwa watoto wote wa Mungu.

Katika ulimwengu uliojaa mabishano na mgawanyiko, wakati hukumu na dharau vimechukua sehemu ya mazungumzo safi, na urafiki kutambulika kupitia ubaguzi, nimekuja kujua kwamba kuna mfano wa wazi, rahisi na wa kiungu tunaoweza kuutazama kwa ajili ya umoja, upendo na kuwa sehemu ya. Mfano huo ni Yesu Kristo. Ninashuhudia kwamba Yeye ni muunganishi mkuu.

Sisi ni Rafiki Zake

Mnamo Desemba ya 1832, wakati “mata-tizo miongoni mwa nchi” yalikuwa “dhahiri zaidi” kuliko wakati wowote tangu kuanzishwa kwa Kanisa, viongozi wa Watakatifu wa Siku za Mwisho huko Kirtland, Ohio, walikusanyika kwa ajili ya mkutano. Walisali “mmoja mmoja na kwa sauti kwa Bwana ili afunue mapenzi yake [kwao].” Katika kutambua sala ya waumini hawa watakatifu katika nyakati za majaribu makali, Bwana aliwafariji, akizungumza kwa Watakatifu mara tatu kwa maneno mawili mazito: “marafiki zangu.”

Yesu Kristo tangu zamani amewaita wafuasi Wake waaminifu marafiki Zake. Mara kumi na nne katika Mafundisho na Maagano Mwokozi anatumia nenorafiki kuelezea uhusiano mtakatifu na wa kupendeza. Siongelei kuhusu nenorafiki kama ulimwengu unavyolifahamu—kumaanisha kuwa na wafuasi wa mitandao ya kijamii na “penda.” Hauwezi kutambuliwa katika tagi au

Admittedly, as a teenager, I remember dreaded conversations when I heard those painful words “Hey, can we just be friends?” or “Let’s just stay in the friend zone.” Nowhere in holy writ do we hear Him say, “Ye are just my friends.” Rather, He taught that “greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” And “ye are they whom my Father hath given me; ye are my friends.”

The sentiment is clear: the Savior numbers each of us and watches over us. This watchcare is not trivial or insignificant. Rather, it is exalting, elevating, and eternal. I see the Savior’s declaration “ye are my friends” as a clarion call to build higher and holier relationships among all of God’s children “that we may be one.” We do this as we come together seeking both opportunities to unite and a sense of belonging for all.

We Are One in Him

The Savior beautifully demonstrated this in His call to “come, follow me.” He drew upon the gifts and individual attributes of a diverse group of followers to call His Apostles. He called fishermen, zealots, brothers known for their thunderous personalities, and even a tax collector. Their belief in the Savior and desire to draw unto Him united them. They looked to Him, saw God through Him, and “straightway left their nets, and followed Him.”

I too have seen how building higher and holier relationships brings us together as one. My wife, Jennifer, and I were blessed to raise our five children in New York City. There in that busy metropolis, we formed precious and sacred relationships with neighbors, school friends, business associates, faith leaders, and fellow Saints.

In May of 2020, just as the world was grappling with the spread of a global pandemic, members of the New York City Commission of Religious Leaders met virtually in an abruptly called meeting. There was no agenda. No special guests. Just a request to come together and discuss the challenges we were all facing as faith leaders. The Centers for Disease Control had just reported that our city was the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States.

nambari kwenye Instagram au X.

Ninakubali, kama kijana, nakumbuka mazungumzo ya hofu wakati niliposikia maneno ya kuumiza “Tunaweza kuwa marafiki tu?” au “Acha tu tubakie marafiki.” Hakuna kokote katika maandiko matakatiifu tunamsikia akisema, “Ninyi ni marafiki zangu tu.” Badala yake, Yeye alitufundisha kwamba, “hakuna upendo mkuu zaidi kuliko upendo wa mtu atoaye uhai wake kwa ajili ya rafiki zake.” Na “ninyi ndiyo wale ambao Baba amenipa; ninyi ni marafiki zangu.”

Hisia iko wazi: Mwokozi anatushabu kila mmoja wetu na kutulinda. Huu ulinzi wa utunzaji si haba au usio muhimu. Bali, ni wa kuinua, kukupeleka juu na wa milele. Ninaona tangazo la Mwokozi “ninyi ni marafiki zangu” kama wito wa wazi wa kujenga mahusiano ya juu na matakatiifumiongoni mwa watoto wote wa Mungu “ili kwamba tuwe wamoja.” Tunafanya hili tunapokuja pamoja tukitafuta fursa za kuungana na hisia ya kuwa sehemu ya, kwa wote.

Tu Wamoja Kwake

Mwokozi kwa uzuri alionyesha hili kwenye wito Wake wa “njoo, unifuata.” Yeye alitumia vipawa na sifa binafsi za makundi mbalimbali ya wafuasi katika kuwaita Mitume Wake. Aliita wavuvi, wakereketwa wa dini, akina kaka waliojulikana kwa sifa zao kuu, na hata mkusanya kodi. Imani yao katika Mwokozi na hamu ya kusogea karibu Naye viliwaunganisha. Walimtegemea Yeye, wakamuona Mungu kupitia Yeye, na “wakaziacha nyavu zao mara moja, wakamfuata.”

Mimi pia nimeona jinsi ambavyo ujenzi wa mahusiano ya juu na matakatiifu hutuleta pamoja. Mimi pamoja na mke wangu, Jennifer, tulibarikiwa kuwalea watoto wetu watano huko Jiji la New York. Huko katika jiji lenye mambo mengi, tulitengeneza mahusiano ya thamani na matatatiifu pamoja na majirani, marafiki wa shuleni, wenza kibiashara, viongozi wa imani na Watakatiifu wenza.

Mnamo Mei ya 2020, wakati ulimwengu ukipambana na kuenea kwa janga la ulimwengu, washiriki wa Tume ya Viongozi wa Kidini ya Jiji la New York walikutana mtandaoni katika mkutano ulioitishwa ghafla. Hapakuwa na ajenda. Hapakuwa na wageni rasmi. Ilikuwa ni ombi tu la kuja pamoja na kujadili changamoto tulizokuwa tunakabiliana nazo kama viongozi wa imani. Vituo vya Kuthibiti Magonjwa vilikuwa ndio vimeripoti kwamba jiji letu ndio kitovu cha

This meant no more gathering. No more coming together.

For these religious leaders, removing the personal ministry, the congregational gathering, and the weekly worship was a devastating blow. Our small group—which included a cardinal, reverend, rabbi, imam, pastor, monsignor, and an elder—listened to, consoled, and supported one another. Instead of focusing on our differences, we saw what we had in common. We spoke of possibilities and then probabilities. We rallied and responded to questions about faith and the future. And then we prayed. Oh, how we prayed.

In a richly diverse city filled with complexity and colliding cultures, we saw our differences dissipate as we came together as friends with one voice, one purpose, and one prayer.

No longer were we looking across the table at each other but heavenward with each other. We left each subsequent meeting more united and ready to pick up our “shovels” and go to work. The collaboration that resulted and the service rendered to thousands of New Yorkers taught me that in a world calling for division, distance, and disengagement, there is always much more that unites us than divides us. The Savior pled, “Be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine.”

Brothers and sisters, we must stop looking for reasons to divide and instead seek opportunities to “be one.” He has blessed us with unique gifts and attributes that invite learning from one another and personal growth. I often told my university students that if I do what you do and you do what I do, we don’t need each other. But because you don’t do what I do and I don’t do what you do, we do need each other. And that need brings us together. To divide and conquer is the adversary’s plan to destroy friendships, families, and faith. It is the Savior who unites.

We Belong to Him

One of the promised blessings of “becoming one” is a powerful sense of belonging. Elder Quentin L. Cook taught that “the essence of truly belonging is to be one with Christ.”

On a recent visit with my family to the West African country of Ghana, I was enamored

UVIKO-19 nchini Marekani. Hii ilimaanisha hakuna tena kukusanyika. Hakuna tena kukutana.

Kwa viongozi hawa wa kidini, kuondoa huduma ya uchungaji, mkusanyiko wa watu na ibada za kila wiki ilikuwa ni jambo la kukatisha tamaa. Kundi letu dogo—ambalo lilijumuisha kadinali, pasta, mwalimu, imamu, mchungaji, kuhani na mzee—walisikiliza, walifariji na kusaidiana wao kwa wao. Badala ya kufokasi kwenye tofauti zetu, tuliona kile tulichokuwa nacho pamoja. Tuliongea kuhusu mambo yamkini na kisha uwezekano. Tuliungana na kujibu maswali kuhusu imani na mambo yajayo. Na kisha tulisali. Ee, tulisali kwa dhati sana.

Katika jiji lenye utofauti mwingi lililojaa mila tofauti na zinazopishana, tuliona tofauti zetu zikitoweka tulipokuja pamoja kama marafiki kwa sauti moja, lengo moja na sala moja.

Hatukuangaliana sisi kwa sisi lakini tuliangalia kuelekea mbinguni pamoja. Tulimaliza kila mkutano uliofuatia tukiwa tumeungana zaidi na tayari kuchukua “sepetu” zetu na kuingia kazini. Muunganiko uliotokea na huduma iliyotolewa kwa maelfu ya watu wa New York ilinifundisha kwamba kwenye ulimwengu wa mgawanyiko, umbali na kutokukubaliana, daima kuna mengi yanayotuunganisha kuliko yanayotutenganisha. Mwokozi alisihi, “Kuweni na umoja; na kama hamna umoja ninyi siyo wangu”

Akina kaka na dada, tunapaswa kuacha kutafuta sababu za kugawanyika na badala yake fursa za “kuwa wamoja.” Yeye ametubariki sisi kwa vipawa vya pekee na sifa ambazo hualika kujifunza kutoka kwa kila mmoja na ukuaji binafsi. Daima huwa nawaambia wanafunzi wangu wa chuo kikuu kwamba kama nikifanya kile wafanyacho na wao wakifanya kile nifanyacho, hatuhitajiani. Lakini kwa sababu hamfanyi nifanyacho na mimi sifanyi kile mfanyacho, tunahitajiana. Na hitaji hilo hutuleta pamoja. Kugawa na kutwaa ni mpango wa adui wa kuharibu urafiki, familia na imani. Ni Mwokozi anayeunganisha.

Sisi tu wa Kwake.

Mojawapo ya baraka ya ahadi ya “kuwa wamoja” ni hisia kubwa ya kuwa sehemu ya. Mzee Quentin L. Cook alifundisha kwamba “msingi wa kuwa sehemu ya, ni kuwa wamoja na Kristo.”

Kwenye matembezi ya hivi karibuni pamoja na familia yangu huko Ghana nchi ya Afrika

with a local custom. Upon arriving at a church or home, we were greeted with the words “you are welcome.” When food was served, our host would announce, “You are invited.” These simple greetings were extended with purpose and intentionality. You are welcome. You are invited.

We place similar sacred declarations on our meetinghouse doors. But the sign Visitors Welcome is not enough. Do we warmly welcome all who come through the doors? Brothers and sisters, it is not enough to just sit in the pews. We must heed the Savior’s call to build higher and holier relationships with all of God’s children. We must live our faith! My father often reminded me that simply sitting in a pew on Sunday doesn’t make you a good Christian any more than sleeping in a garage makes you a car.

We must live our life so that the world does not see us but sees Him through us. This does not take place only on Sundays. It takes place at the grocery store, the gas pump, the school meeting, the neighborhood gathering—all places where baptized and unbaptized members of our family work and live.

I worship on Sunday as a reminder that we need each other and together we need Him. Our unique gifts and talents that differentiate us in a secular world unite us in a sacred space. The Savior has called upon us to help one another, lift one another, and edify each other. This is what He did when He healed the woman with an issue of blood, cleansed the leper who pled for His mercy, counseled the young prince who asked what more he could do, loved Nicodemus, who knew but faltered in his faith, and sat with the woman at the well, who did not fit the custom of the day but to whom He declared His messianic mission. This to me is church—a place of gathering and recovery, repair and refocus. As President Russell M. Nelson taught: “The gospel net is the largest net in the world. God has invited all to come unto Him. ... There is room for everyone.”

Some may have had experiences that make you feel you do not belong. The Savior’s message to you and me is the same: “Come unto me, all ye

Magharibi, nilipendezwa na mila za wazawa. Tulipokuwa tukifika kanisani au nyumbani, tulisalimiwa na maneno “unakaribishwa.” Wakati chakula kilipoandaliwa, mwenyeji wetu angetangaza, “Mnaalikwa.” Salamu hizi rahisi zilitolewa kwa lengo na kwa makusudi. Mnakaribishwa. Mnaalikwa.

Sisi huweka tangazo kama hilo tukufu katika milango yetu ya nyumba za ibada. Lakini alama Wageni Wanakaribishwa haitoshelezi. Je, tunawakaribisha kwa ukunjufu wote wapitao mlangoni? Akina kaka na akina dada, haitoshi tu kukaa kwenye mabENCHI. Tunapaswa kuitikia wito wa Mwokozi wa kujenga mahusiano ya juu na matukufu pamoja na watoto wote wa Mungu. Lazima tuishi imani yetu! Baba yangu mara kwa mara alinikumbusha kwamba kukaa tu kwenye bENCHI siku ya Jumapili hakukufanyi uwe Mkristo mwema na bora kama ambavyo kulala gereji hukukufanyi uwe gari.

Tunapaswa kuishi maisha yetu ili kwamba ulimwengu usituone sisi lakini umuone Yeye kupitia sisi. Hii haifanyiki siku za Jumapili tu. Hufanyika dukani, kwenye kituo cha mafuta, kwenye mkutano wa shule, kwenye mkusanyiko wa majirani—sehemu zote ambazo washiriki waliobatizwa na ambao hawajabatizwa wa familia zetu hufanya kazi na kuishi.

Ninaabudu katika siku ya Jumapili kama ukumbusho kwamba tunahitajiana na kwa pamoja tunamhitaji Yeye. Vipawa vyetu vya pekee na talanta ambazo hututofautisha katika ulimwengu huu hutuunganisha katika sehemu takatifu. Mwokozi anaitua tusaidiane, tunyanyuane na tujengane. Hiki ndicho alichokifanya Yeye alipomponya mwanamke mwenye kuvuja damu, alipomtakasa mwenye ukoma aliyemsihi kwa ajili ya neema Yake, alipomshauri mwana mfalme aliyeyuliza afanye nini zaidi, alipompenda Nikodemu ambaye alijua lakini akasita kwenye imani yake, na alipoketi na mwanamke kisima—ni kinyume na mila za wakati huo lakini kwa mwanamke huyo Yesu alimtangazia misheni yake ya kimasiya. Hii kwangu ndio kanisa—sehemu ya kukusanyika na kuponywa, kurekebisha na kufokasi upya. Kama Rais Nelson alivyofundisha: “Nyavu za injili ni nyavu kubwa sana ulimwenguni. Mungu amewaalikawotewaje Kwake. ... Kuna nafasi kwa ajili ya kila mmoja.”

Baadhi wanaweza kuwa na uzoefu ulio-wafanya kuhisi kutokuwa sehemu ya. Ujumbe wa Mwokozi kwako na mimi ni ule ule: “Njoni

that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”The gospel of Jesus Christ is the perfect place for us. Coming to church offers the hope of better days, the promise that you are not alone, and a family who needs us as much as we need them. Elder D. Todd Christofferson affirms that “being one with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is without doubt the ultimate in belonging.”To any who have stepped away and are seeking a chance to return, I offer an eternal truth and invitation: You belong. Come back. It is time.

In a contentious and divided world, I testify that the Savior Jesus Christ is the great unifier. May I invite each of us to be worthy of the Savior’s invitation to “be one”and to boldly declare, as He did, “Ye are my friends.”In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

kwangu, ninyi nyote msumbukao na wenye kulemewa na mizigo, nami nitawapumzisha.”Injili ya Yesu Kristo ni sehemu sahihi kwa ajili yetu. Kuja kanisani hutoa tumaini la siku njema, ahadi kwamba hauko peke yako, na familia inayotuhitaji sana kama tunavyowahitaji. Mzee D. Todd Christofferson anathibitisha kwamba “kuwa wamoja pamoja na Baba, Mwana, na Roho Mtakatifu pasipo shaka ndio kilele cha kuwa sehemu ya.”Kwa yeyote aliyeondoka na anatafuta nafasi ya kurejea, ninatoa ukweli na mwaliko wa milele: Wewe ni wa sehemu hii. Rudi. Huu ndio wakati.

Katika ulimwengu wa migongano na uliogawanyika, ninashuhudia kwamba Mwokozi Yesu Kristo ni Muunganishi mkuu. Acha nimualike kila mmoja wetu kuwa wenye kustahili kwa ajili ya mwaliko wa Mwokozi wa “kuwa wamoja”na kwa ujasiri kutangaza, Yeye kama alivofanya, “Ninyi ni marafiki zangu.”Katika jina takatifu la Yesu Kristo, amina.