

“Return unto Me ... That I May Heal You”

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“Nirudie Mimi ... Ili Niweze Kukuponya”

Na Mzee S. Mark Palmer
Wa Urais wa Sabini

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*There is rejoicing in heaven over those who return.
It is not too late for you to come back.*

We once lived in a home surrounded by majestic trees. Next to the entrance was a beautiful willow tree. One sad night a mighty storm blew, and the willow came crashing down. It lay on the ground with its roots pulled out and was a sorry sight.

I was ready to rev up the chainsaw and cut the tree up for firewood when our neighbour came running out to stop me. He chastised me for giving up on the tree, and he emphatically urged us not to get rid of it. He then pointed to one root still in the ground and said that if we propped the tree up, cut off its branches, and nourished it, the roots would take hold once again.

I was sceptical and doubted how a tree so obviously fallen and in trouble could possibly survive and come back to life. I reasoned that even if it did begin growing again, it would surely not survive the next storm. But knowing our neighbour believed the tree still had a future, we went along with the plan.

And the result? After some time, we saw signs of life as the tree began to take root. Now, 12 years later, the tree is vibrant and full of life, with strong roots, and once again contributing to the beauty of the landscape.

While I meet Saints around the world, I am reminded of this willow tree and how there is hope even when all seems lost. Some once had testimonies of the gospel that were strong and vibrant like the willow. Then, for uniquely personal reasons, those testimonies became weakened, leading to a loss of faith. Others hang on with the

*Kuna furaha mbinguni juu ya wale wanaorudi.
Bado hujachelewa kwa ajili yako kurudi.*

Tuliwahi kuishi katika nyumba iliyozungukwa na miti mikubwa. Kando ya mlango huo kulikuwa na mti wa muerebi mzuri. Usiku mmoja wa huzuni dhoruba kali ilivuma, na muerebi ukaanguka chini. Ulilala chini na mizizi yake kung'olewa na ilikuwa hali ya kuhuzunisha.

Nilikuwa tayari kuwasha msumeno na kuukata mti huo kwa ajili ya kuni wakati jirani yetu alipotoka mbio kunizuia. Alinionya kwa kukata tamaa juu ya ule mti, na yeye akatusihi kwa msisitizo tusiuondoe. Kisha akaonyesha mzizi mmoja uliokuwa chini na kusema kwamba tukiuegemeza mti huo juu, tukate matawi yake, na kuulisha, mizizi itatokezea tena.

Sikuwa na hakika na nilitilia shaka jinsi mti ulioanguka na kuwa na matatizo, ungeweza kunusurika na kufufuka. Niliwaza kwamba hata kama ungeanza kukua tena, hakika hautahimili dhoruba inayofuata. Lakini kwa kujua jirani yetu aliamini mti bado una kesho yake, tulikubaliana na mpango huo.

Na matokeo? Baada ya muda, tuliona dalili za uhai pale mti huo ulipoanza kuota. Sasa, miaka 12 baadaye, mti huo unachangamka na umejaa uhai, na mizizi yenye nguvu na kwa mara nyingine tena unachangia uzuri wa mazingira.

Wakati ninapokutana na Watakatifu kote ulimwenguni, ninakumbushwa juu ya mti wa muerebi huu na kwamba kuna matumaini hata wakati yote yanaonekana kupotea. Baadhi wakati fulani walikuwa na ushuhuda wa injili ambao ulikuwa na nguvu na mahiri kama mti wa muerebi. Kisha, kwa sababu za kipekee za kibinafsi, shuhu-

slimmest of roots tapping into gospel soil.

Yet again and again, I am inspired by the stories of so many who have chosen to renew their discipleship and come back to their Church home. Rather than discarding their faith and belief like worthless firewood, instead they have responded to spiritual promptings and loving invitations to return.

I attended a stake conference in Korea where a returning member shared: “I thank the brothers for their willingness to accept my lack of faith and my weakness, for reaching out to me, and for the members who are always so kind to me. I still have a lot of friends around me who are less active. It’s funny, but they tell each other to go back to the Church to get their faith back. I think maybe they are all longing for faith.”

To all who are longing for faith, we invite you to come back. I promise your faith can be strengthened as you once again worship with the Saints.

A former missionary from Africa wrote a senior Church leader, apologising and seeking forgiveness for being offended by his teachings about a certain cultural tradition, which then led him to leave the Church. He humbly expressed: “Sadly, the fact that I took offense 15 years ago has made me pay an extremely heavy price. I lost so much—much more than I ever imagined. I am deeply embarrassed by the harm I may have caused along the way, but above all else I am pleased that I have found my way back.”

To all who recognise what you have lost, we invite you to come back so you can once again taste the joyous fruit of the gospel.

A sister in the United States was gone from the Church for many years. Her story of coming back includes powerful lessons for parents and family members who anguish over loved ones who step away. She wrote:

“I could list a myriad of reasons for why I walked away from the Church, the gospel, and in a way, my family. But they really don’t matter. I didn’t make one big decision to leave the Church—I probably made a thousand choices. But one thing I have always known is that my parents did make one big decision, and they stuck to it. They decided to love me.

da hizo zikadhoofika, na kusababisha kupoteza imani. Wengine huning’inia na mizizi dhaifu zaidi iliyoshikilia kwenye udongo wa injili.

Bado tena na tena, nimetiwa moyo na hadithi za wengi sana ambao wamechagua kufanya upya uanafunzi wao na kurudi kwenye nyumba zao za Kanisa. Badala ya kutupa imani yao kama kuni zisizofaa, badala yake wameitikia misukumo ya kiroho na mialiko ya upendo ya kurudi.

Nilihudhuria mkutano wa kigingi nchini Korea ambapo mshiriki aliyerejea alishiriki: “Ninawashukuru akina kaka kwa utayari wao wa kukubali ukosefu wangu wa imani na udhaifu wangu, kwa kunifikia, na kwa waumini ambao daima wamekuwa wema kwangu. Bado nina marafiki wengi karibu nami ambao hawahudhurii kikamilifu. Inachekesha, lakini wanaambiana warudi Kanisani ili kurudisha imani yao. Nadhani labda wotewanatamani imani.”

Kwa wote wanaotamani imani, tunawaalika mrudi. Ninaahidi imani yako inaweza kuimarishwa unapoabudu tena pamoja na Watakatifu.

Mmisionari wa zamani kutoka Afrika alimwandikia kiongozi mwandamizi wa Kanisa, akitubu na kuomba msamaha kwa kukerwa na mafundisho yake kuhusu desturi fulani ya kitamaduni, ambayo yalimfanya aachane na Kanisa. Alisema kwa unyenyekevu: “Inasikitisha, uhalisia kwamba nilikereka miaka 15 iliyopita imenifanya nilipe gharama kubwa sana. Nilipoteza sana—zaidi ya nilivyowahi kufikiria. Nimeaibishwa sana na madhara ambayo huenda nimesababisha njiani, lakini zaidi ya yote ninafurahi kwamba nimepata njia yangu ya kurudi.”

Kwa wote wanaotambua kile ambacho mme-poteza, tunawaalika mrudi ili muweze kuonja tena matunda ya furaha ya injili.

Dada mmoja huko Marekani alikuwa ametoka Kanisani kwa miaka mingi. Hadithi yake ya kurudi ni pamoja na masomo ya nguvu kwa wazazi na wanafamilia ambao wana huzuni juu ya wapendwa wao wanaoondoka. Aliandika:

“Ningeweza kuorodhesha maelfu ya sababu za kwa nini nilienda mbali na Kanisa, injili na kwa njia fulani, familia yangu. Lakini kwa kweli haijalishi. Sikufanya uamuzi mmoja mkubwa wa kuacha Kanisa—pengine nilifanya chaguzi elfu moja. Lakini jambo moja ambalo nimekuwa nikijua ni kwamba wazazi wangu walifanya uamuzi mmoja mkubwa, na waliushikilia kikamilifu.

"I couldn't possibly know how many tears have been shed, how many sleepless nights, nor how many heartfelt pleading words of prayer have been uttered on my behalf. They didn't call me out on my sins; rather, they called out to me in my sinfulness. They didn't make me feel unwelcome in their home and at family gatherings; any of those feelings were of my own doing. Instead, they continued to welcome me. They must have seen my light dim over time. But they knew that the person I was back then was just a shadow of who I was yet to become.

"Just as my path away from the Church was complex, so was my way back. But one thing that was not hard about coming back was the feeling of being back home where I belong."

My message today is especially to all who once felt the Spirit but question whether there is a way back or a place for you in the restored Church of Jesus Christ. It is also for any who are barely hanging on or who are tempted to step away.

This message is not a challenge, and it is not a condemnation. It is an invitation, extended with love and a sincere desire to welcome you back to your spiritual home.

I have prayed that you will feel the witness of the Holy Ghost as you now hear this loving invitation and magnificent promise from our Saviour, Jesus Christ:

"Will ye not now return unto me, and repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you?"

Every week many are responding to the Saviour's invitation by returning to discipleship and Church activity, quietly and humbly seeking the healing that Jesus promises. And contrary to narratives which sometimes circulate, record numbers of our young people are choosing to stay strong and to grow their faith in Jesus Christ.

When some of Jesus's followers in Capernaum found His teachings hard and chose to leave, He turned to His Apostles and asked, "Will ye also go away?"

This is the question we each must answer as we face our individual times of testing. Peter's response to Jesus is timeless and resounding: "To

Waliamua kunipenda.

"Nisingeweza kujua ni machozi mangapi yamemwagika, siku ngapi za kukosa usingizi, wala ni maneno mangapi ya kusihi ya kutoka moyoni ambayo yamesemwa kwa niaba yangu. Hawakunikosoa mimi kwenye dhambi zangu; bali walikosoa hali yangu ya dhambi. Hawakuni-fanya nihisi kutokubalika nyumbani kwao na kwenye mikusanyiko ya familia; hisia zozote zile zilikuwa zangu mwenyewe. Badala yake, waliendelea kunikaribisha. Lazima wangeiona nuru yangu ikifika kwa muda. Lakini walijua kwamba mtu niliyekuwa wakati huo alikuwa kivuli tu cha nani ningekuwa bado.

"Kama vile njia yangu kutoka kwa Kanisa ilikuwa tata, ndivyo ilivyokuwa njia yangu ya kurudi. Lakini jambo moja ambalo halikuwa gumu kurudi ni hisia ya kurudi nyumbani mahali pangu."

Ujumbe wangu leo hasa ni kwa wote walio-wahi kuhisi Roho lakini wanahoji kama kuna njia ya kurudi au nafasi kwenu katika Kanisa la urejesho la Yesu Kristo. Vile vile ni kwa wale wote ambao wananing'inia tu au wale ambao wanajaribiwa kuondoka.

Ujumbe huu sio changamoto, na sio lawama. Ni mwaliko, unaotolewa kwa upendo na nia ya dhati ya kukukaribisha tena kwenye nyumba yako ya kiroho.

Nimeomba kwamba mtahisi ushuhuda wa Roho Mtakatifu mnaposikia sasa mwaliko huu wa upendo na ahadi kuu kutoka kwa Mwokozi wetu, Yesu Kristo:

"Je, mtarudi kwangu sasa, na kutubu dhambi zenu, na kugeuka ili niwaponye?"

Kila wiki wengi wanaitikia mwaliko wa Mwokozi kwa kurudi kwenye uanafunzi na shughuli za Kanisa, kwa utulivu na unyenyekevu wakitafuta uponyaji ambao Yesu anaahidi. Na kinyume na masimulizi ambayo nyakati fulani husambaa, idadi kubwa ya vijana wetu wanachagua kuwa imara na kukuza imani yao katika Yesu Kristo.

Wakati baadhi ya wafuasi wa Yesu huko Kapernaumu walipoona mafundisho Yake kuwa magumu na wakachagua kuondoka, Yeye aliwa-geukia Mitume Wake na kuwauliza, "Je, ninyi pia mtaondoka?"

Hili ndilo swali ambalo kila mmoja wetu anapaswa kujibu tunapokabiliana na nyakati zetu binafsi za majaribio. Jibu la Petro kwa Yesu ni la

whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.”

So as you consider the Saviour’s invitation to return unto Him, what might you learn from the story of the willow tree?

The journey back is often not easy or comfortable, but it is worth it. When our willow was stood back up, all its branches were cut away. It was not pretty. We too may feel vulnerable as we discard old ways and are stripped of pride. Focusing your faith on Jesus Christ and His gospel—the trunk and the roots—will give you the hope and the courage to take that first step back.

It took many years for our willow to regain its former strength and beauty. Now it is even stronger and more beautiful than before. Be patient as your faith and testimony also grow. This includes not taking offense at thoughtless comments like “Where have you been all these years?”

The willow would never have survived without constant care and nourishment. You will nourish your faith and your testimony as you feast at the sacrament table each week and as you worship in the house of the Lord.

Just as the willow needed sunshine for its branches and leaves to grow again, so your testimony will grow as you stay sensitive to the feelings and the witness of the Spirit. Learn from Amulek, who described his time as a less-active member by saying, “I was called many times and I would not hear.”

My neighbour knew what the willow could once again become. So too the Lord knows your divine potential and what your faith and your testimony can become. He will never give up on you. Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, all that is broken can be healed.

I witness that there is rejoicing in heaven over those who return. You are needed, and you are loved. I testify that Jesus Christ is our Saviour and that He blesses all who return unto Him with greater peace and with great joy. His arms of mercy are not folded but are open and extended to you. It is not too late for you to come back. With all the love in our hearts, we welcome you home. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

kudumu na linalojulikana sana: “Twende kwa nani? Wewe unayo maneno ya uzima wa milele.”

Kwa hivyo unapofikiria mwaliko wa Mwokozi wa kurudi Kwake, unaweza kujifunza nini kutoka kwenye hadithi ya mti wa muerebi?

Safari ya kurudi mara nyingi si rahisi au ya kufariji, lakini inafaa. Mti wa muerebi ulisimamiwa, matawi yake yote yalikatwa. Haukuwa vizuri. Sisi pia huenda tukahisi hatari tunapozia cha njia za zamani na kuvua kiburi. Fokasi imani yako kwa Yesu Kristo na injili Yake—shina na mizizi—kutakupa tumaini na ujasiri wa kuchukua hatua hiyo ya kwanza ili kurejea.

Ilichukua miaka mingi kwa mti wetu wa muerebi kupata nguvu na uzuri wake wa zamani. Sasa ni imara zaidi na mzuri zaidi kuliko hapo awali. Kuwa mvumilivu kadiri imani yako na ushuhuda unavyokua. Hii inajumuisha kutoketwa na maoni yasiyo na maana kama vile “Umekuwa wapi miaka hii yote?”

Muerebi usingeweza kuishi bila utunzaji na lishe ya kila wakati. Utalisha imani yako na ushuhuda wako unapokula kwenye meza ya sakramenti kila wiki na unapoabudu katika nyumba ya Bwana.

Kama vile muerebi ule ulihitaji mwanga wa jua kwa matawi na majani yake kukua tena, vivyo hivyo ushuhuda wako utakua unapoendelea kuwa makini kwa hisia na ushuhuda wa Roho. Jifunze kutoka kwa Amuleki, ambaye alielezea muda wake kama muumini asiyeshiriki kika-milifu kwa kusema, “Niliitwa mara nyingi na sikusikia.”

Jirani yangu alijua kile muerebi ungeweza kuwa siku moja. Hivyo pia Bwana anajua uwezo wako wa kiungu na imani yako na kile ushuhuda wako unaweza kuwa. Kamwe Yeye hatakata tamaa juu yako. Kupitia Upatanisho wa Yesu Kristo, yote ambayo yamevunjwa yanaweza kuponywa.

Ninashuhudia kwamba kuna furaha mbinguni juu ya wale wanaorudi. Unahitajika, na unapendwa. Ninashuhudia kwamba Yesu Kristo ni Mwokozi wetu na kwamba Yeye hubariki wote ambao wanarudi Kwake kwa amani kuu na shangwe kuu. Mikono yake ya rehema haijakunjwa bali iko wazi na imenyoosha kwako. Bado hujachelewa kwa ajili yako kurudi. Kwa upendo wote katika mioyo yetu, tunawakaribisha nyumbani. Katika jina la Yesu Kristo, amina.