



## homily

Grace: the savior's generous and earnest invitation

Come forth unto me

3nephi 11.<sup>13-17</sup>

<sup>13\*</sup>The Lord spake unto them saying:

<sup>14</sup>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.'

<sup>15</sup>“And<sup>\*1</sup> 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 do, 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, that it was he, of whom it was written by the prophets, that should come. <sup>16</sup>And when they had all gone forth and had witnessed for themselves, they did cry out with one accord, saying:

<sup>17</sup>“Hosanna!

Blessed be the name of the Most High God!’

“And they did fall down at the feet of Jesus, and did worship him.”

## Introduction

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This homily is focused on our Atonement title: “Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation.”<sup>2</sup> In it, we explore one of the most cherished narratives in the Book of Mormon in which the Savior personally visits and ministers to the Nephites. This narrative is found in 3

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<sup>1</sup> The ‘\*’ that will often be found in quotations from the Book of Mormon, indicates that I have dropped the ubiquitous “And it came to pass” from the quotation.

<sup>2</sup> The ten titles are: “Fall: Our Need of Atonement;” “Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation;” “At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us;” “Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us;” “Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement;” “Justification: How We Repent and Change;” “Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement;” “Sanctification: Imitating and living Jesus’ life of Atonement;” “Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement;” and “The Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me.”

Nephi. We will limit our study to 3 Nephi 11.<sup>12-17</sup>. Before exploring these verses, however, we should provide the context of the Savior's visit and his generous and earnest invitation.

Due to a series of storms and other natural disasters that lasted several days and were unlike any other in its recorded history, Nephite society was in shambles. A large percentage of the population had perished in the catastrophe. After nearly a year,<sup>3</sup> the infrastructure and institutions that hold society together still laid in ruins. Survivors remained in shock,<sup>4</sup> uncertain how to regroup and rebuild.

While the very real human cost in lives and emotional well-being is not to be trivialized, this experience can serve as a kind of metaphor or parable; symbolic of our need of atonement. The individual Nephites and Nephite society that were in free fall, with individuals and institutions incapable of jump-starting themselves, are a metaphor for the fall spoken of so often in scripture. The need that individual Nephites and their society had for something extraordinary if there was to be a reconstitution of man and society is a metaphor for the state of all humankind and its need of regeneration.

Something extraordinary *did* happen in Nephite history. First, they heard a voice, repeatedly, as if it came from the skies. It was the most extraordinary voice, bringing with it the most extraordinary emotional and physical effects, even though its message was not quite clear.

“It was not a harsh voice, neither was it a loud voice; nevertheless, and notwithstanding it being a small voice it did pierce them that did hear to the center, insomuch that there was no part of their frame that it did not cause to quake; yea, it did pierce them to the very soul, and did cause their hearts to burn.”<sup>5</sup>

Looking up from whence the voice seemed to originate, “they saw a Man descending out of heaven; and he was clothed in a white robe; and he came down and stood in the midst of

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<sup>3</sup> See 3 Nephi 8.<sup>5</sup> and 3 Nephi 10.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>4</sup> 3 Nephi 11.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>5</sup> 3 Nephi 11.<sup>3</sup>

them...”<sup>6</sup> But this could not be a man. Perhaps, they thought, he was an angel. But, no, this was neither man nor angel. This was Jesus Christ. God, himself. The God of the Nephite people. The God of the Book of Mormon.

\*“He stretched forth his hand and spake unto the people, saying:

‘Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world. And behold, I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning.’”<sup>7</sup>

We glean much from this divine self-revelation. Prophets can speak of him in the third person. “He is this.” “He is that.” “He did this.” “He did that.” “He wants this.” “He wants that.” But there is simply nothing, nothing like Deity speaking of and for himself. “I AM.” We will come back to this self-revelation at a later time. But, for now, we wish to turn to and bask in the Savior’s generous and earnest invitation.

by invitation only

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“Come forth unto me.”

There are some words that, if I had my way, would be exorcised from the LDS vocabulary. “Spirit prison.” That’s one. I am pretty sure it is not a prison. “Spirit school” is more like it, if I do not misunderstand my Mormon eschatology. I’m pretty sure that Deity doesn’t place people there as punishment. Rather, they are there for their own protection and instruction. It is an act of divine mercy.

“Do ye suppose that ye shall [be required to?] dwell with him under a consciousness of your guilt? Do ye suppose that ye could be happy to dwell with that holy Being, when your souls are racked with a consciousness of guilt that ye have ever abused his laws?

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<sup>6</sup> 3 Nephi 11:<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> 3 Nephi 11.<sup>10-11</sup>

Behold, I say unto you that ye would be more miserable to dwell with a holy and just God, under a consciousness of your filthiness before him, than ye would to dwell with the damned souls in hell. For behold, when ye shall be brought to see your nakedness before God, and also the glory of God, and the holiness of Jesus Christ, it will kindle a flame of unquenchable fire upon you.”<sup>8</sup>

No, any punishment that might be dished out at “spirit school” is self-imposed. But, as I so often say, that is a subject for another homily.

“Commandment.” That’s another word far, far too profligate in our vocabulary and culture. The God whom we call, “Father,” and the God we call “Son,” do way, way, way more instructing and inviting than they do commanding—this too deserves its own homily, or two, or ten.

But it is absolutely certain, beyond certain, beyond the proverbial shadow of a doubt that these four words, “Come forth unto me,” were and are by way of invitation, not commandment.

“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...”

This is invitation.

his generosity...

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To call the invitation that Jesus extended to Nephites present at the time of his visit, “generous” and “earnest” is an understatement of gigantic proportions.

First, we will say that this invitation was “generous” in both kind and degree. What do we mean?

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<sup>8</sup> Mormon 9.<sup>3-5</sup>

It was generous in kind because, well, look who was being invited! Don't be fooled by the fact that "it was the more righteous part of the people who were saved,"<sup>9</sup> preserved in the storms and natural calamities. Given the horrendous state of society before the catastrophes, it is not libelous to say that the bar was not all that high. Besides, remember, "All are hardened; yea, all are fallen and are lost." Why, even at our best, when we might be serving our God "with all [our] whole souls," we are, even then, "unprofitable servants."<sup>10</sup> "All our righteousness are as filthy rags"<sup>11</sup>—really, Isaiah? "ALL"? You're going to go there? Pull an Amulek?

Though resurrected and glorified, this was the same humble Jesus who was so open, so extravagant in his invitations during his mortal ministry.

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden..."<sup>12</sup>

No, this "multitude" was composed of pretty ordinary Joes and common Sallys. It is a multitude of folks laboring under and laden with all sorts of spiritual toil and burdens, just like their brothers and sisters on the other side of the globe.

And yet, look how generous Jesus was in degree! "Thrust!" "Feel!" "Touch my wounded body." "Make contact, interact with my resurrected, glorified, holy, divine body!"

Oh, the intimacy of it all! Oh, the generosity of it all! Is there any evidence, anywhere, of his love for and commitment to us greater than that which is found in these wounds? These prints, even the prints in his feet, Oh, how beautiful they are!

"O how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that is the founder of peace, yea, even the Lord, who has redeemed his people; yea, him who has granted salvation unto his people; for were it not for the redemption which he hath made for his people, which was prepared from the foundation of the world, I say unto

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<sup>9</sup> 3 Nephi 10.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See Mosiah 2.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Isaiah 64.<sup>6</sup>. "Filthy rags" is "menstrual cloth."

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 11.<sup>28</sup>

you, were it not for this, all mankind must have perished.”<sup>13</sup>

Yes, to hear him *speak* of himself is glorious and wonderful. But to be allowed to touch him, touch the greatest, most blessed tokens of love in the universe, it is almost too much. Beyond words. What atonement! What at-one-ment! What connectedness!

Yes, this invitation to touch was an act of at-one-ment. The direct contact formed an unbreakable and seamless bound. When the invitees were finished touching him, there was an unbreakable link, a blessed and cherished connectedness. Now that’s generosity!

… *a*nd earnestness

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I suppose you’ve been to a concert, a fair, a sporting event, and hopped in your car to leave only to find yourself waiting, and waiting, and waiting as thousands of other people attempt to exit at the same time.

I have no doubt that our Book of Mormon “multitude” was far more orderly and polite than those impatient crowds of spectators, but, it *was* quite the multitude—2500, according to the text’s estimate.<sup>14</sup>

“This they did do, going forth one by one until they had all gone forth, and did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands…”

Just how earnest is Jesus about his invitation, “Come forth unto me,” would you say?

Very, I’d say. Extremely.

“One by one.” “One by one” they ALL went forth. Every single one of them seems to have had their own personal audience with Jesus as they “did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands” his wounds, his tokens of love.

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<sup>13</sup> Mosiah 15.<sup>18-19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> 3 Nephi 17.<sup>25</sup>

I suppose that you've considered this before, but I'll ask anyway. How long would it take 2500 people to stand, form a line, approach, touch, say what they needed to say, hear what they need to hear, and move away? How long did each individual have with the Savior? How long to touch his wounds? No doubt, it varied according to the need, as Jesus always serves the one as the one needs served. Nevertheless, we are talking about a lot of time. Hours. And hours.

Just for kicks, let's assume each person was given just 15 seconds—this seems unrealistically short, but, hey, it's just for kicks. That means it took ten and one-half hours for everyone to meet with and touch him. It seems likely that it was longer, hours longer. Now, I know that Jesus has all the time in the universe, but still, he was ministering to time-bound mortals. There was much they needed to learn. There was much he had to say. He could surely have covered a lot more ground through group work.

But there was nothing more important than the individual, the one. There was nothing that would teach each member of the multitude more about Deity and the economy of heaven, nothing that was more likely to change who he or she was and transform their character than to touch his wounds, tokens of his love, his fidelity, his atonement, his attachment.

Yes, Jesus is pretty earnest in his invitations. He's pretty committed to being there for those who need him, whatever it takes and however long it takes.

They did cry out

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Finally, Jesus conducted his final audience. Everyone had seen and touched for themselves. The 2500 individuals were, once more a multitude. But it was a united multitude. They had experienced for themselves Jesus' at-one-ment. They had felt the unity into which he willingly entered with them. His example of oneness was infectious.

“They did cry out *with one accord*...”

Now, I know that this can be read simply as a mundane statement that they all cried out together, at the same time. Some have read it in the belief that the multitude's "Hosanna," was part of a planned cultic event. Maybe. But, however one understands their joint cry, it seems reasonable to see it as a symbol of the multitude's unity—an initial oneness that would endure for two hundred years. Even the ministry of a prophet as powerful as Alma could only produce a few years, possibly a dozen years at best of unity and peace. But when Jesus ministers personally, one by one, he can raise peace and unity to a whole new, higher, unimaginable level.

This unity is precisely the point. First, Jesus revealed his and his Father's at-one-ment; their connectedness with the multitude, nay, with each individual in the multitude. The revelation of such unexpected divine generosity and good-will drew the individual to Christ. Each individual—changed, reformed, regenerated, born again—felt connected to Jesus and felt connected to every other individual. These regenerated individuals formed community. This community, interconnected with strong links extending out from each individual in all directions, formed the basis for a happy and secure individual and group existence. It became a progressive community, expanding beyond the limits of any individual's power.

"Hosanna," as you no doubt know, means something like, "Save us," or "Save now." It sounds like a request and a hoped-for future. But, here, it seems to me, we hear something else. I, at least, hear, "He *has* saved us." "*He has saved us now.*"

I suppose that one could conclude that the multitude's "Blessed be the name of the Most High God!" was uttered to God, the Father. But, I think, this is too simplistic. The Most High God was standing right before them in the person of Jesus.<sup>15</sup> The Most High God had stood for hours ministering to them one by one in the most intimate fashion. They could not remain standing. And they could not remain neutral.

"And they did fall down at the feet of Jesus, and did worship him."

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<sup>15</sup> Not that it really matters, as Father and Son are so deeply one.



Don't you dare ever let anyone tell you, as it has been told me, that we honor, but do not worship Jesus; that we worship one God, Heavenly Father! This is false on more levels than we can count. But... yes, you guessed it, that's a discussion for another time.

## Conclusion

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Nephite society was in shambles. It had fallen. Many had perished. Many more felt lost. Recovery seemed far off, if even possible. Into this void, this chaos, Jesus strode or, rather, descended. Better yet, condescended—condescended because he came down to be “with,” associate, and form connections with the bruised and battered people. He would spend hour after hour on that first day, inviting individuals, one by one, to “come forth unto [him]” and intimately handle his resurrected and glorious body; to feel, understand, and appreciate his commitment to them through the wounds that decorated his celestial body. He did this because... well... he could do nothing less. That is the kind of being he was and is. That is the kind of grace he possesses. It is the kind of grace that any may witness and be moved by if they will but arise and come and look and feel.

This grace, this revelation of at-one-ment accomplished its mission. The 2500 individuals became one. They praised and worshiped Jesus in unison. They would remain one for two hundred years.

We marvel at the invitation extended to and the privileges experienced by each individual Nephite. We almost envy them. We look forward to the day when we may be so blessed, for we too are invited to come forth, look, and feel. Jacob invites us to “view his death.”<sup>16</sup> More powerfully, Jesus himself invites us to

“Look unto me in every thought;  
doubt not, fear not.  
Behold the wounds which pierced my side,  
and also the prints of the nails in my hands and feet...”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Jacob 1.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>17</sup>DC6.<sup>36-37</sup>

Until that day, we will always remember and trust in his inner, his characteristic, his dispositional goodwill. We will raise our voice in awe, in gratitude, and in hope.

“Hosanna!

Blessed be the name of the Most High God!”

Without hesitation or shame, we will “fall down at the feet of Jesus, and... worship him.”

“Even so, come, Lord Jesus”!

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