

Elder Earl C. Tingey

The widows of Zion

I have entitled my talk "The Widows of Zion." The dictionary defines a widow as "a woman who has lost her husband by death and . . . has not remarried."¹

Some widows are young. Their husbands often have met an untimely death. If young children adorn their home, the young widow bears the sole responsibility for rearing them. She has an unanswered question: "Why has this happened to me?" Extreme loneliness is not unusual.

Other widows are older. Their husbands, following a lifetime of cherished companionship, have died of old age or ill health. Decades of loving memories, shared joy in rearing a noble family, and mutual service to Church and community are replaced by loneliness and feelings of being unneeded or unwanted. The question "How long must I wait before I can join my eternal companion?" remains unanswered. Their temple work may increase. Life often becomes more difficult. Living with family or in assisted-care facilities may replace a family home filled with a lifetime of memories.

Being alone is foreign to our sisters when they become widows. They want to be helpful and to contribute to the well-being of others. Many have limitations because of poor health. They want to remain faithful so they may one day join their eternal companions. They can teach us much about faith.

Caring and providing for widows

The doctrine of the Church is very clear regarding widows.

In the early Church, the leaders were chastised for neglecting their widows. "Seven men of honest report" were called to assist.²

Paul instructed the Saints to honor widows.³ He taught that anyone who provided "not for his own, and specially

for those of his own house, . . . hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."⁴

As Brigham Young organized the first pioneer trek to the valley of the Great Salt Lake in 1847, he counseled the Saints as follows:

"Let each company bear an equal proportion, according to the dividend of their property, in taking the poor, the widows, the fatherless, and the families of those who have gone into the army, that the cries of the widow and the fatherless come not up into the ears of the Lord against this people."⁵

I believe this effort of helping the widows cross the plains is one of the greatest modern examples of how we should care for widows.

Modern revelation reveals the order of the Church:

"Women have claim on their husbands for their maintenance, until their husbands are taken. . . . Children have claim upon their parents for their maintenance. . . .

"And after that, they have claim upon the church."⁶

The Doctrine and Covenants states further, "And the storehouse shall be kept by the consecrations of the church; and widows and orphans shall be provided for, as also the poor."⁷

The book of James contains one of the most beautiful descriptions of the doctrine of the Church regarding our responsibility as family and friends of widows: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."⁸

The term *widows* is used 34 times in the scriptures. In 23 of these passages, the term refers to widows and the fatherless. I believe the Lord has a tender feeling toward widows and the fatherless, or

orphans. He knows that they may have to rely more completely on Him than on others. Their prayers will be more personal and lasting, service to fellowmen more genuine, and faith greater.

The faith of widows in the scriptures

The faith of widows is legendary in scripture.

The widow of Zarephath showed her faith when she provided the prophet Elijah with a morsel of bread rather than using the last of her meal and oil to feed her son and herself and then die. The scriptures record:

"And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days.

"And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah."

Perhaps symbolic of the trust widows have in the Lord is the phrase "and she went and did according to the saying of Elijah."

Anna, a widow of about 84 years who served continually in the temple, recognized the infant Jesus at His presentation in the temple.¹⁰

Perceiving the great faith of the widow of Nain, Jesus Christ raised her dead son, her only son, as he was being taken outside the gate of the city to be buried.¹¹

As an example of the true spirit of giving, the story of the widow's mite is forever immortalized as among the greatest of all the Savior's teachings:

"The people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much.

"And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites. . . .

"And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury:

"For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living."¹²

Encouragement and advice for widows

To you wonderful sisters who find yourselves as widows, please know that God loves you. You are the choice among the choice. I know whereof I speak. My own mother has been a widow for almost three years. She presides as a noble matriarch over an extended family of 247. My wife's mother, who is 97, remains faithful and continues to endure to the end, despite failing health. Dear sisters, your very lives, as an example of righteous living, continue to inspire younger family members to do better. You continue as teachers.

At some period in God's timetable, you will join your eternal companion and serve together, forever, in the great work in the spirit world.

For you young widows with ever-increasing family responsibilities, know that God is aware of your needs and that He will provide. Continue to exercise faith and good works. Faithful family and Church members will assist. Be willing to receive assistance from others as necessary. Your children will know that you provide them with a double measure of love. It is my testimony that our Heavenly Father will abundantly compensate your family with eternal blessings because of the goodness of your hearts.

Be caring and considerate of widows

To the family and friends of widows, God knows of your service and He may judge your works by how well you assist the widow. President James E. Faust once shared with the General Authorities a wonderful story about how neighbors and friends in a small farming community in central Utah treated the widows. They each had so many hours or minutes to take water turns to irrigate their home

gardens. They agreed that they could each take a little less water so that the widows of the neighborhood could have more water for their gardens.

I recently observed five elderly widows drive together to a Church meeting in a modest car. They entered the meeting together and sat down beside each other. They seemed to draw strength and protection from one another. I felt the goodness of their noble lives as I watched their tender association with one another in the twilight of their lives.

Brothers and sisters, the Lord loves widows. I know that the leaders of the Church are concerned about the welfare of widows. We members should care for and assist the widows within our family, home, ward, and neighborhood. I urge you young people—members of the Primary, youth, and young adults—to take the opportunity to assist and draw strength from the widows in your community.

May we be more caring and considerate to the widows of Zion is my humble prayer. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed. (1993), "widow," 1352.

2. See Acts 6:1–3.
3. See 1 Timothy 5:3.
4. 1 Timothy 5:8.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 136:8.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 83:2, 4–5.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 83:6.
8. James 1:27.
9. See 1 Kings 17:8–16.
10. See Luke 2:36–38.
11. See Luke 7:11–15.
12. Mark 12:41–44; see also Luke 21:1–4.

President Hinckley

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has spoken to us, followed by Elder Earl C. Tingey of the Presidency of the Seventy.

The choir and congregation will now sing "Israel, Israel, God Is Calling." Following the singing, Sister Mary Ellen Smoot, Relief Society general president, will address us. She will be followed by Elder Henry B. Eyring of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

The choir and congregation sang "Israel, Israel, God Is Calling."

Sister Mary Ellen Smoot

We are all creators

We are all creators. We are walking along a bridge in time that crosses the threshold of a new millennium. This is an exciting and significant time. These are the days the prophets have foreseen. This is an age of faith, opportunity, and wonder.

I marvel when I think of this world so rich in beauty, so perfect in function. This world was created by Jesus Christ under the direction of our Heavenly Father. Creation is one of the characteristics that defines God. He takes matter

without form and molds it into stars, planets, and solar systems. "Worlds without number have I created," He tells us.¹

Brothers and sisters, we are children of God. Shouldn't we be about our Father's business? Shouldn't we be creators as well?

You might say, "I'm not creative." I'm here to tell you, you are. You are creators. Have you ever coaxed a smile from a baby? Have you ever taught someone to forgive? Have you helped someone learn to read? Prepared a family home evening? Organized a family reunion?