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In the Old Testament, Mount Zion held special significance to the people of God. After becoming settled in Canaan, Zion (Jerusalem) became the center of both their civil affairs and their religious life. But Zion is also rich in symbolism for the New Testament church of Jesus Christ. As New Testament believers, we "are come unto mount Sion [Zion], . . . the heavenly Jerusalem" (Hebrews 12:22). As members of spiritual Zion, we receive inspiration and make applications from the psalms and songs exalting Zion. Psalm 48 is a beautiful example of these triumphant strains.

"Walk about Zion." We observe Zion, not in a spirit of self-gratitude, but in deep humility, grateful to God for His glorious provision and for the manifold blessings Zion encompasses for us. As recipients of God's gracious goodness, we rejoice to be "accepted in the beloved" (Ephesians 1:6). Our ties to the brotherhood encourage, strengthen, and challenge us. Our connection with Zion helps us to be more perfectly conformed to the image of Christ. And we receive countless blessings of practical brotherhood assistance in both realms—natural and spiritual.

"Tell the towers thereof." Count the many fortifications that God has provided for the church. God has set watchmen in the towers of Zion, watchmen who are called to watch with vigilance and perception. These watchmen must guard the gates. They must sound the trumpet of alarm against the advances of Zion's enemies. Through numerous opportunities for collective worship, God gives instruction and inspiration. He has given us a wealth of doctrinally sound books and periodicals. He has provided Christian day schools—a fortress for the little ones in Zion. And He has compassed us with a rich heritage of loyal and godly examples. These blessings and numerous others fortify us as we wend our way heavenward.

"Mark ye well her bulwarks." Not only do we count the fortifications; we must also set our hearts to these strongholds. This speaks of identity, loyalty, and involvement. As individual members, we mark the bulwarks when we think and speak of "our church" rather than "the church," a term that indicates a less personal relationship. We mark the bulwarks as we each maintain a living, personal relationship with Zion's King. This is the divine breath that gives life to Zion. This inward life must and will be coupled with a carefulness to have our outward lives conformed to the standards and patterns of Zion. If our hearts are set to the strongholds of Zion, we

will be present for worship opportunities and active in service opportunities.

"Consider her palaces." The church is made up of homes. Strong, spiritual, stable homes strengthen the church. In these palaces God is known for a refuge. For the blessings of Zion to continue and the fortresses to stand, fathers and mothers must direct home life according to the precepts of our heavenly Father. The palaces of Zion are well-ordered places of peace and love, of obedience and respect. They are harmonious with unity and joyous with song.

"Tell it to the generation following." Each generation of the faithful receives the legacy of Zion from the previous generations. This legacy is a trust not only to be kept but also to be transferred to each rising generation. If we are to tell the generation following, we must keep alive the history of God's people. If we would transfer the legacy of Zion, we must give daily, practical expression to the faith of our fathers. If the rising generation is to flourish in Zion, we must faithfully instruct them in the "all things" of the Gospel and safeguard them against the pressures of acculturation.

As we walk about Zion and observe the towers, the bulwarks, and the palaces, we rejoice with the psalmist: "Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God." We also realize that God places responsibilities upon and requires accountability of the citizens of Zion. We are grateful that the grace of God, which made provision for us to become members of Zion, also enables each of us to make an edifying contribution to this city, of which "glorious things are spoken" (Psalm 87:3).

Saviour, if of Zion's city
I, through grace, a member am,
Let the world deride or pity,
I will glory in Thy name;
Fading is the worldling's pleasure,
All his boasted pomp and show;
Solid joys and lasting treasure
None but Zion's children know.
—John Newton



"Come Thou With Us"

"Come thou with us, and we will do thee good," are Moses' words of invitation to his brother-in-law Hobab (Numbers 10:29). We know little about Moses' relationship with his wife's family. Jethro, his father-in-law, had visited from Midian and counseled Moses to delegate some of his leadership responsibilities. Probably Hobab also later visited Moses while the Israelites were encamped at Mount Sinai.

Hobab flatly refused Moses' first invitation. Moses pressed again, concluding with the promise that God's blessings to Israel could be his as well. Even though his journey with God was fraught with challenges, Moses claimed God's promise, "The LORD hath spoken good concerning Israel" (Numbers 10:29). He desired Hobab to come along and likewise receive the blessings. The Scriptural record (Judges 1:16; 4:11) suggests that Hobab accepted Moses' invitation.

This account raises several questions: How can we do as Moses? Are we convinced that we have found God's blessing something worth sharing with others? Does it do for us what it did for Moses? What can we do to invite others to come along and experience the goodness of God?

The invitation "come thou with us" will appeal to others if we have first made our peace with God and are walking with Him. At an earlier time, Moses had also been where Hobab was: in the wilderness feeding sheep, away from God's people. But God had called him to go to Egypt and lead the Israelites to Canaan. Moses certainly would have missed a blessing had he disregarded God's call and stayed in the wilderness.

Today much effort is made among individuals and churches to "evangelize" others. Meanwhile discipleship and obedience to the Word are minimized. But no amount of compromise under the slogan "we need to be reaching out" will be blessed by God. Ultimately, these efforts fail, and individuals and churches join the world. The invitation is for all, but there will be no blessing and no Canaan for those who "come short of it" through unbelief (Hebrews 4:1).

The invitation "come thou with us" will appeal to others if we uphold Biblical separation. For Israel there were diverse laws that, when followed, set them apart from other nations and sanctified them before God. God blessed Israel abundantly as they followed His way. Today, we are called with a similar call: "Come out from among them, and be ye separate ... ; and I will receive you.... and ye shall be my sons and daughters" (2 Corin-

thians 6:17, 18). Having responded to this call, we "have tasted that the Lord is gracious" (1 Peter 2:3). We do well when we invite others to come with us as we are unashamed of a practical, disciplined life based on this teaching of separation. Again, if compromise happens here, what blessing from God will be ours? What blessing will we have to offer others?

The invitation "come thou with us" will appeal to others if we are not too busy to see the needs. Moses could have overlooked his brother-in-law because of his weighty responsibilities as Israel's leader, but he did not. Like Moses, we invite our families. In many ways, our lives are wrapped up in giving this most important invitation. We know that each soul we have brought into this world will spend an eternity somewhere. Besides our families, our neighbors should be hearing and sensing the invitation, "Come thou with us." What do they see and hear? What influence are we having on their souls?

There is a fine line between being profitably occupied and constantly racing from one event to the next. Those events may be legitimate and necessary, things such as occupational duties, social relationships, and church life. But neighbors see us, and they know us by our fruits. If our lives reveal a pressure similar to that which the world lives with, what do we have to offer? If they repeatedly hear phrases such as "I must run," we communicate that we really do not have time for them and that they are not important to us. In our zeal for far away missions, we may possibly run right past the souls God has placed next to us—for us to influence.

The invitation "come thou with us" will appeal to others if our personal lives and our church life are inviting, consistent, and transparent. Few things are more discouraging and cause more people to turn away than to have them come, only to be disappointed by inconsistency in application of Bible principle. We must be willing to include them as one of us. Moses did this for his family, and in this way, they enjoyed the blessings of Israel. The Bible way is for all, and when a person is committed to truth, he deserves to be treated as one of the brethren. He must sense that he is wanted and needed in church life. His ideas are not discounted because of who he is.

Each one who accepts the invitation to "come thou with us" makes a contribution to the brotherhood. Moses told Hobab, "Thou mayest be to us instead of eyes" (Numbers 10:31). Sufficient time must be given for them to understand applications to Bible principle. It is unrealistic for those of us who have been guided in this way from childhood to expect those who come with us to adjust "overnight." As faithful mentors, we must be sensi-

tive. We should not be discouraged or frustrated when growth seems slow.

We live in a generation of high-speed living, and too many times that approach spills into our relationships with one another. But high-speed relationships are unsustainable and may well result in high-speed chaos.

The invitation "come thou with us" will appeal to others as we clearly identify where we are going. Moses did this for Hobab: "We are journeying unto the place which the LORD said, I will give it you." The promise was sure. A God who cannot lie had spoken. Today perplexity and distress are part of people's lives. Men's hearts are "failing them for fear" (Luke 21:26). People are concerned about extreme weather patterns. They are disturbed and expend much energy to stop earth pollution and earth decay. In such a world, we can and should be a testimony of a life at peace. Opportunities come for each of us to tell others of our faith and the peace that results. Is our simple faith strong enough to share that we trust a God who controls these things? We can remind others of God's promise to mankind: "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease"(Genesis 8:22). We can tell them that God's Word declares that this earth is nearing its end. Life on earth will not reach a utopia. Life here will not go on forever. But for the child of God, life after death is glorious.

The invitation "come thou with us" will appeal to others if we keep in view who God is and who we are. He must live in us. Our lights shine only as the true Light dwells within. This is God's work, and His ways we cannot know. This is a work that will go on with or without us. We do not hold a monopoly on the Word, or His kingdom. Life is peaceful when we keep that vision.

Finally, each of us must keep our eternal Canaan in view. If we forget our journey's goal or fail to maintain our personal salvation, all our laboring here is useless. We may have tried to accomplish much and influenced many. But of what value would this be if, having given the invitation, we ourselves "should be a castaway" (1 Corinthians 9:27)? Let us so live that both our lips and our lives consistently declare, "Come thou with us."

Brother Jason



Nurturing the Music Tastes of Our Youth

The Mennonite Church has been blessed with a rich musical heritage. We value this heritage and want to preserve it. Thousands of songs have been written. Our forefathers have endeavored to "prove all things; [and to] hold fast that which is good." However, with the multiplicity of musical recordings available today, the need to evaluate music and to nurture spiritual, upbuilding music interests in our youth is urgent.

Is it reasonable to expect our youth to want the right kind of music? Absolutely!—if they are born again, renewed in mind, crucified to carnality, and partakers of the divine nature. Yes, just as our ungodly neighbors were, we were born with a depraved nature which must be reckoned dead. However, it quickly revives if fed. We can nurture only what is alive—the music interests that presently exist. Endeavoring to nurture good tastes will be ineffective if a youth is secretly listening to sensual music.

Music, as an expression of the heart, is a window into it. Nurturing the heart condition is a prerequisite to nurturing music tastes. While we are concerned for our youth, their nurture began many years before they became youth. When one father challenged his son for his poor music choices, he replied, "You fed me that as a child." Although the father had repented and had grown in conviction, the damage was already done.

The most effective way to nurture a wholesome music appetite is to sing. Wholesome music tastes are developed by regular singing in church services and schools although homes carry the primary responsibility. Active singing will greatly affect children.

We should sing formally such as in regular family worship and informally as we work. We should sing while traveling. At family gatherings singing should be encouraged over volleyball or other forms of entertainment. Even when we are tired or sorrowing, we should sing! Singing draws our minds heavenward and lifts our spirits.

The hymnbooks of the church should be the primary resource for our homes. While we appreciate songs of testimony and Christian experience (spiritual songs), we must realize that these songs only give expression when a heart has first been nurtured by hymns of worship and truth. "People who sing only songs of testimony and experience, or who listen only to songs of testimony and experience, will be spiritually shallow." Parents, if we want spiritually strong youth, we must avoid a regular diet of spiritually

shallow songs such as are prominent in the Heartland Hymns. We may safely allow a slight variation in the songs we sing at home, but our singing must always nurture an appreciation for the weightier, more edifying songs of the church.

We also nurture wholesome music tastes in our youth by promoting musical training and skills development to a degree that enhances true worship. An inability to sing well dampens the desire and enthusiasm for singing. We thank God for the way in which our schools have improved our congregational singing. But an overemphasis on training and skills development fosters pride. This is evident when we become critical of others, exclude the less talented, or lose appreciation for congregational singing. In order to nurture wholesome music tastes, we must carefully monitor and limit recorded music. Youth do not need sound systems in their bedrooms. Private listening through earphones should be very limited. We should all sing more and listen less.

Our Discipline states, "Singing in small groups may be engaged in for personal enjoyment and inspiration." This reason for engaging in singing should also be the reason we listen to singing. By listening basically for entertainment, we automatically open the door to questionable music. Our Discipline also states, "A cappella singing and recorded selections that reflect the emphasis of modern gospel song performers with their entertaining appeal should be eliminated." Are we truly eliminating music which is substandard with God and the church?

The message of a song appeals to the spirit, the melody and harmony appeal to the soul (emotions), and the rhythm appeals to the body. The message is prominent in spiritually upbuilding music. The music must be only the vehicle by which the message is delivered. The doctrine of the Trinity is woven into "Come, Thou Almighty King." Concepts of Christ's incarnation and deity are implanted by "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing." The devil is also aware of this concept and seeks to promote casual Christianity through a lighter message coupled with a catchy tune or intentional silence about the commitment required for genuine discipleship.

Parents, do we know what kind of music our youth enjoy? Music should not enter our homes or vehicles without our approval. God will hold us accountable for the music in our homes. Will each of us be an Abraham, who commanded his children, or an Eli, who failed his sons.

We must reject the entertainers and performers even though they may be labeled as "Gospel" and "a cappella." Music characterized by tempo, rhythm, and volume reach the soul through the body rather than through

the spirit. With the body in gear and the mind in neutral, we go in reverse. Entertainers abuse familiar, sacred hymns by singing them to contemporary tunes and rearrangements. These new versions actually tamper with the message of the text by using music that clashes with the intended feeling of the words. Instead of being a catalyst of truth, it becomes a distraction. Like the fowls of the air, the music devours the truth before it has the opportunity to sprout. Some recent rearrangements include songs such as "Amazing Grace," "Just As I Am," and a syncopated version of "Let the Lower Lights Be Burning."

Entertainers and performers can often be identified by casual photos of the singers on the cover and by the sprinkling of solos throughout the recording. When individual talent and ability are on display, men are worshiped instead of God. Idolatry is evident when one is excited over the latest recording of a certain group without critically evaluating its content. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen" (1 John 5:21).

Technology has made hoarding and hiding unacceptable music much easier. This destroys one's moral fiber. Unless parents can understand and use the music storage devices of their youth, they should be considered unsafe. Electronic music files on computers, personal players, or cell phones make accountability very difficult. These devices make sensual, intoxicating music as readily available as illegal drugs on the street.

Our youth face peer pressure—and it is real! Can they resist? The challenge is ultimately to us as parents. May our goal be to help our youth understand the imperative of living with a conscience void of offense. Eternal destinies are at stake!

Brother Roland



Church Committee Report MMM Trustee Fund

The MMM Trustee Fund grew out of an interest to facilitate the donation of estate assets, real estate, and larger sums of money to the church. This enables the donors to remain anonymous and relieves the Mission Board of needing to handle real estate. Guidelines for the formation and function of the MMM Trustee Fund were presented for discussion at a churchwide ministers' meeting on January 24, 1990, and were later approved with some revisions on April 11, 1990, by the churchwide ministerial body.

The responsibility of the trustees of the Fund is to manage and disburse any contributions from the brotherhood. The primary purpose of the Fund is to provide monies for mission projects and for church and school buildings in outlying areas of the church. Funds are not used to meet routine monthly MMM expenses, brotherhood assistance needs, or deacon work. Congregational offerings are expected to meet those needs. But the Fund has proven to be a blessing in helping to meet pressing brotherhood assistance needs on a temporary basis. Monies, when available, can be loaned to congregations until offerings can be lifted. At that time the borrowed funds are returned to the Trustee Fund and are available for other needs. In the twenty-four years of the existence of the Trustee Fund, many congregations have been helped to meet emergency needs. This provides funds so that early payment discounts on medical bills can be taken and timely accident settlements made.

Requests for loans can be brought from the deacons or mission committees to any of the trustees whose names are listed in the annual church directory. Requests which have been approved by the trustees are taken to the MMM for final approval before funds are disbursed. A report of Trustee Fund receipts and disbursements is given periodically at an Informative Meeting. This report is for transactions over a two-year period in order not to focus attention on any one contributor.

Anyone who wishes to donate funds or property to be used for kingdom interests may do so by direct donation or through naming the MMM Trustee Fund as a beneficiary in his will. May we in these last days endeavor to be good stewards of the resources God has entrusted to us as a church and, thereby, faithfully occupy "till he come."

Brother Robert



Lengthening the Cords – The Pirapo'i Congregation Paraguay.

Note: In accordance with our privacy policy names of person have been deleted.

Pirapo'i is a small town and surrounding community in Paraguay, South America, about twelve kilometers by road to the west of the Varana church. Near the beginning of the work at Varana in the late eighties, several families moved from the Pirapo'i area to join the Varana congregation. During 2002 a friend of a family at Varana, made occasional trips to Varana on horseback to attend Sunday morning services. He and his wife made

a commitment and expressed their desire to join the church. Sunday afternoon services were held occasionally at their home, and on alternate Sundays they were brought to the Varana services. Efforts to move to Varana never materialized. The...family began attending the services at the Oru6s' home and made a Christian commitment in June 2004. Both of these couples and some of their children were received as members at Varana and were regularly brought to services. Their children were brought to Varana for school.

In early 2006 a committee of three brethren, was appointed to investigate property possibilities for the location of a church and a mission family. In July of 2006 a recommendation was made to the MMM Board to purchase two properties of six hectares each, and build two brick houses and a frame church building. Two families were asked to move to Pirapo'i in early 2007.

A simple frame church with dirt floors and backless benches was constructed, and the first service was held in January 2007. Only one Sunday morning service per month was held. The group was still transported to Varana for other services. A family moved to the mission house on the church property in February 2007, and the other moved in March of the same year. A third family also moved to the area in April of 2008. Sunday morning services were held every second, third, and fourth Sundays at Pirapo'i with prayer meetings every other Wednesday.

During one family's first furlough in May 2008, the brother was ordained to the ministry in his home congregation, bringing an abrupt change to the family's plans. The family returned to Pirapo'i for about six months to make the transition and finalize their property interests in Paraguay. A family who were serving at Varana, moved to Pirapo'i in February of 2009. An elderly sister from Varana, relocated to the Pirapo'i area in January 2009 to be closer to her family. Another young family from Varana, the also moved to Pirapo'i in July of 2011. For the first number of years, Pirapo'i had no resident ministry. The Varana ministry served as the local ministry along with the help of the ordained brethren of the other congregations.

In 2011 a brother and his family agreed to serve a two-year term as minister at Pirapo'i. They arrived in September 2011, to fill in as furlough coverage at Varana while preparing for their move into the mission house on the church property in Pirapo'i. One of the original families purchased a property of their own and built a house. They moved out of the mission house in December and the ordained brother who arrived in September 2011 moved in. During this term of service this brother and his family re-

ceived release from their home congregation to continue serving.

As the work became better staffed, the trips to services at Varana were discontinued. The congregation currently has twenty-one members. Schoolchildren continue to travel to the Varana school, the upper-grade teacher, transports them.

Relationships with the community folks are good in general, and various ones visit, especially when invited for revival meetings. We are reminded of the words of our Lord: "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." However, we rejoice that a Gospel testimony and influence are present in this community.

Brother Jonathan

For the Pirapo'i Congregation



Anticipating Our Lord's Return (Part 1) Believe

On a day in late spring almost two thousand years ago, Jesus led His disciples out of Jerusalem. Before their astonished eyes, He ascended into heaven. As they strained to catch another glimpse of Him, two white-robed men stood by them. "This same Jesus," they said, "shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." After so many years, do we really believe that Jesus is coming again?

We believe that our Lord will return because He has promised it. Jesus had told His disciples about the Father's house and the dwelling places there. The earth is one place of abode. Jesus was about to leave this place and go to another place. Just because Jesus was going away did not mean that He would cease to exist. No, He went to heaven to prepare that place for us. "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself" (John 14:3). It is a fact that Jesus is gone; it is just as sure that Jesus is coming again.

We believe that our Lord will return because we see the signs of His coming. When Jesus' disciples had inquired about a sign of His coming, He told them that there will be an increase in wars, earthquakes, famine, disease, apostasy, and persecution (Matthew 24:6-12). Since these signs are appearing on the horizon, we know that Jesus' return for His own (1 Thesalonians 4:13-18) could happen any moment.

Jesus' return for His people is imminent. We are waiting for the shout, the voice of the archangel, the trump of God, and the appearing of our Saviour to call us home. It may be today. It may be tonight. It may be before we take our next breath.

Because we believe that our Lord will return, we anticipate eternity. It is one thing to think about Jesus' return when we are facing difficulties or danger. But anticipating Jesus' return must be much more than a hope of escape in a time of trouble. Do we really long for Jesus' return when things are going well and life is enjoyable? Or do we want to experience the good things of this life first? Somehow we need to realize that the blessings of eternity with Jesus are immeasurably better than the best we can experience in this earthly life.

Certainly, we all believe that Jesus will return. We believe in our minds. We know what the Bible says. But do we indeed believe with our hearts? Or do we tend to think that Jesus is coming sometime. Do we believe with anticipation? Do we look forward to Jesus' return more than anything else? "Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not" (Luke 12:40).

Brother Robert





PRAYER POINT

*“The effectual fervent prayer
of a righteous man availeth much”*

Pray for the MMM Board as it gives direction to the mission work in seven foreign countries. Pray that God would grant wisdom in responding to other Macedonian calls. The mission board meets on the first Wednesday of each month.

Pray for the Schoolteachers' Instruction Course at Ashland. Approximately forty brethren are preparing to share instruction and inspiration with the schoolteachers. Pray that this program would continue to wield a Biblical, conservative influence among us.

Pray that God would bless the church with holy wisdom in relating to the use of modern technology. The potential for worldly absorption and internal disunity is great. Pray that God would especially bless our leaders in discerning the will of the Lord.

Thank the Lord for the many children among us. Two hundred eighty more precious infants were entrusted to our parents in 2013. They are an heritage of the Lord, "the children which God hath graciously given" us.

