

Rhea Christensen's Funeral Remarks

Bishop Cameron Ford, May 15, 2020

Remarks given at a small graveside service in the Kaysville Cemetery due to COVID-19 Pandemic Limitations

My name is Cameron Ford and I am the Bishop of the Kaysville 11th ward, the ward that Don and Rhea Christensen have lived in for so many years. Their family has felt like it was a permanent fixture in our neighborhood, so it is hard to see them both gone now. It will be two years on July 6th, since I conducted the funeral services for Don. I feel privileged to have been asked by the family once again to conduct Rhea's graveside funeral and share a few remarks. Following my remarks, the grave will be dedicated by Rhea's youngest son, Devin Bingham Christensen.

It has been said that funerals are not for the dead, but for the living. It is in that spirit that I wish to share with you the lessons I have learned as I have pondered the life of Rhea Christensen.

Life is hard; at times unbearably so. We know that one of the reasons that we are here on this earth is to experience the bitter, so that we can know to treasure the sweet. But sometimes life can dole out so much hardship and heartache that our vision can become clouded and we can wonder when the good is going to show up so that we can treasure it?

I have been shocked on numerous occasions as I have learned of the back surgeries and witnessed the number of health challenges, suffering, and trials that Rhea has gone through over the years. It has made me wonder how much one person can endure, but endure it she did! I believe it was her faith in our Heavenly Father and our Savior that gave her the strength to soldier on and even to find joy in her journey, regardless of her challenges. When we would visit her, she would often express her gratitude for the Gospel and her love for, and her pride in, her family. She faithfully listened to our recorded sacrament meetings every week saying how happy they made her. She always anxiously awaited my arrival to do tithing settlement with her in her home at the end of each year, and I don't believe she ever let her Temple Recommend expire even though she could no longer attend. Rhea certainly had down times, but she also clearly experienced joy as well. Her example shows us the reality of President Nelson's statement that "We can feel joy even while having a bad day, a bad week or even a bad year! ... The joy we feel has little to do with the circumstances of our lives and everything to do with the focus of our lives"

I want to quote the thoughts I shared at Don's funeral nearly two years ago that I feel equally apply to Rhea, and gives a good example of where their focus really was:

“For Christmas one year, my wife and I gave the Christensen’s a little framed image depicting all of the different names of Christ. You would have thought that we had given him a million dollars. He wrote us a thank you card written in his shaky handwriting, thanked me on the phone, and proudly displayed it in their living room. And yet in truth, I believe this response beautifully demonstrates what Don and Rhea value more than all the money in the world: Christ and His Gospel. I believe that was where Don’s [and Rhea’s] true strength came from.”

In closing, I want to share the thoughts brought about by the near-death experience that the scholar Hugh Nibley had as a young man in southern California in 1936. I feel these are hopeful thoughts about what Rhea and Don are experiencing right now, and about the true purpose of life. Of the experience, Nibley recalled that:

“Not only was I in all possession of my faculties, but they were tremendous. I was light as a feather and ready to go, you see, and above all I was interested in problems. I had missed out on a lot of math and stuff like that ... Well, five minutes and I can make up for that ...

So that gives me a great relief. So that’s why I don’t take this very seriously down here [on Earth]. We just are sort of dabbling around, playing around, being tested for our moral qualities — and, above all, the two things we can be good at, and no two other things can we do: we can forgive and we can repent.”

I testify that this is true. All that really matters in life is that we learn how to love, how to forgive, and how to repent. Everything else pales in significance. I testify that through the atonement of Jesus Christ we can all be successful at these, the most important missions of our lives. I bear my witness of Him and the reality of the redemption and resurrection that He has made available to Don, to Rhea, and to all of us.

And I do so in His sacred name, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.