

## Confusion in the Storm

“Hear and Trust the Lord in the Storm” Conference

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Our theme for this conference is Hearing and Trusting God in the Storm. Isaiah saw the last days and prophesied a tabernacle in Zion that would serve as a “covering from the storm” in our time (Isa 4:6, OC Isa 1:12)

Ammon in the Book of Mormon also saw the last days. He taught

(Those brought into the light of God) shall not be beaten down by the storm at the last day;... but when the storm cometh they shall be gathered together in their place, that the storm cannot penetrate to them; yea, neither shall they be driven with fierce winds whithersoever the enemy listeth to carry them. (Alma 26:6, NC Alma 14:16 )

So According to Ammon, at the last day:

- a storm is coming that can beat us down
- fierce winds will carry some away
- a gathering is coming which will protect those gathered
- an enemy desires to drive us out of our place of safety

I’ve wondered what these fierce storm winds of our common enemy are.

All of our speakers have described the storm in their talks.

Foreshadowing what would happen to Joseph in Nauvoo, the Lord used these words to Joseph: “if fierce winds become your enemy.” Whitney Horning has told us what those fierce winds were, in part. (T&C 139:8)

In our time the fierce storm winds come in the form of false governments that rob us of our freedom, false philosophies: social reforms, partisan politics, and in religion what Joseph Smith called “a war of words and a tumult of opinion”.

The ammunition for the “war of words” are words. Today I want to explore how our common enemy uses words to beat us down.

One of the earliest stories about language comes from the Bible: the story of Babel. As the Bible tells the story and as I was taught in Mormon Sunday School, everyone on earth went from speaking the same language to many languages all of a sudden. The way I was taught this story doesn’t jive at all with what is known about historical linguistics. Languages don’t pop into existence fully formed overnight, they morph slowly.

Chances are you have believed this story. The Book of Mormon suggests a very different interpretation to this old story.

The second sentence of Moroni’s title page introduction to the Book of Mormon recalls a time that the Jaredites came from the great tower and refers to “confounding the language”.

“Confounding the language” is generally thought to be a miraculous event where all people speaking in a single tongue suddenly found themselves speaking previously unknown languages: Japanese, Swahili, Navajo and Finnish causing them to scatter into common language groups. The text, however, does not say “suddenly every man was speaking a new language”. It was the people not their language who were confounded. The prayer of the brother of Jared was that the Lord “will not confound us that we may not understand our words”.

Please don't miss this point. First people become confounded and then they cannot understand their own words. That is the basic mechanism that the book of Mormon teaches for the confounding of language at the great Tower. It is how the pure Language of the First Fathers became defiled.

Emerson expresses a parallel thought. Here are his words.

“The corruption of man is followed by the corruption of language”

Hugh Nibley asks, “How can it possibly be said that “we may not understand our words”? Words we cannot understand may be nonsense syllables or may be in some foreign language, but in either case they are not our words. The only way we can fail to understand our own words is to have words that are actually ours change their meaning among us.”

This is a very different telling of the story of Babel. It's not a story where God waves his hand and everybody is now speaking in a different tongue, instead, it's what is actually happening to us at this time. It's current events. Our language is being confounded today and this Old Story is a story for us today.

The Bible gives some idea what language was like after the confounding the language but has nothing to say about the pure language of the the First Fathers before the confounding. For that we need to look at Joseph Smith's inspired translation of Genesis.

“And a book of remembrance was kept, in the which was recorded, in the language of Adam, for it was given unto as many as called upon God to write by the spirit of inspiration; And by them their children were taught to read and write, having a language which was pure and undefiled. (OC Genesis 3:14)

The history of the world is a chiasm. This pure language was in the beginning and we need to go back to the beginning. So we ought to ask, what made the language of Adam pure. What would that mean? What constitutes purity in language?

The word confound is often used to mean confuse but it's root meaning and it's common use in prior centuries referred to mixing or blending. You wouldn't have guessed that would you? Because we never use it that way. When impurities are added to a pure thing it is then impure or defiled.

Language becomes confounded when words change meaning, when new meanings are mixed into the language. People become confounded when the philosophies of men are mingled or mixed with the word of the Lord. Now we can begin to understand what it

meant by Adam had a pure language that was undefiled. The words had only their original meaning, pure. The meaning was not defiled by other meanings mixed in from outside sources.

And why would Jared worry about such a thing? Aren't the new words created by the mixing just as useful in communicating? Let's leave that as a rhetorical question for now.

I'd like to look at examples from the secular world. We'll start out with some innocent examples then get more serious and shift to religion.

Words changing meaning is called "Semantic change" and is a big area of study: virtually our entire vocabulary is subject to words changing meaning. It's hard to find an old word that means the same thing today as it meant long ago?

For example, unless you are unusual, you have never been exposed to the original meanings of these familiar English words: nice, silly, fizzle, fathom, clue, myriad, flirt, hussy, egregious and senile. Nice meant silly and silly meant blessed. Hussy and egregious both negative terms today were positive long ago and meant housewife and distinguished, respectively.

Language changes for many reasons, some are quite understandable For eg. when new technology requires the invention of new words. Consider these familiar words Cloud, canoe, catfish, friend, follow, handle, like, meme, ping, sandbox, tablet, text, troll and tweet, these words have already shifted from their exclusive pre-internet meanings to their dominant internet usages today. Today is more common for the FBI to catch catfish than for fishermen.

Jargon words are introduced into language in part as a way to verify that the speaker and listener are part of the same club. I ask my ten-year-old grandson, "what are the latest cool words today?" His answer, lit, dope, dank, swag, swol, gaines and yeet , I didn't know any of these words and therefore obviously not part of his club, although since preparing this talk I've been told by this same grandson that yeet is no longer in vogue.

Language can also be used to push others away, to turn them into outsiders and banish them from the conversation. One of our doctors came from the midwest, came to Utah to be trained in Family Medicine. He took a medical history from a patient who told him that the Sunbeams were driving her crazy. So he ordered a psychiatric consult rather than empathize with the woman for her struggles teaching other parents three-year-olds on Sunday.

Whatever section of society we examine we find a rapidly changing vocabulary, some of it is benign but not all.

Think about the language of abortion. The act of terminating the life of a fetus has completely different language depending on what side of the argument you're on. whether you are "pro life" or "pro-choice", one side uses the term, it's the same act but but different words to encourage or condemn the act.

The Book of Mormon uses the word confound with three objects: confounding language, confounding people and confounding doctrine. They go together. The word marriage

provides a case study to show how the corruption of man, doctrine and language go together.

Rock Waterman did a thorough review of the history of marriage in a piece called *The Real Threat To Traditional Values*. He explains how the first union between a man and a woman involved A 3 way covenant between man/woman and God.

Over the centuries, priests became witnesses of the covenant then later took over as the authority for the ceremony. Eventually the government did what governments always do, they sold licenses to get a piece of the action. Overtime, this old word was coopted to refer to a very, very old practice-homosexuality. The definition of Marriage has been changed in Webster's dictionary from "The act of uniting a man and woman for life" to " The formally recognized union of two people as partners in a personal relationship". Now There are even those advocating Human-animal marriage further confounding the meaning of this sacred sacrament.

You can see how first people become confounded over what marriage is , then the language of marriage is confounded and it ends is confounded doctrine about the marriage covenant.

Language is being used as a tool to erode gender identity as well. Just in the last five years over 40 pronouns have been added to the dictionary for persons who don't like to be referred to as he or she. They in this context (used as a SINGULAR pronoun) was named 2019 Word of the Year by Merriam-Webster.

The corruption of language is at times purposely done by persons in power for nefarious reasons. George Orwell in some of his books explored how words are used by political leaders to manipulate the people- coining words like doublethink, crimethink, and newspeak.

Matt Lohmeier in his book "Irresistible Revolution "summarizes the observations of professor Fan Shen who lived through the cultural revolution in China of the 1960s, as follows:

One of the ways (revolutionaries or comrades as they called themselves) exposed hidden enemies was by "constantly changing language and altering the meaning of words, watching to see who would adopt the new vocabulary and who would reject it. One had to stay up on the current vocabulary to avoid indicating he was an enemy of the cause".

This is a real life example of Orwell's "newspeak".

Think about that phrase: current vocabulary. Some Words being current (say woke) and others no longer in Vogue. It can only happen in an unstable culture with confounded language.

Our own culture often glams onto catch phrases with Uber-Mormons adopting the new vocabulary even displaying catch phrases like "Hasten the work" & "Lengthen your stride" as needle point wall art. The blog barerecordoftruth has highlighted this phenomenon with "buzz words" like "Minister". In 2015 "Ponderize" was popular briefly with profiteers selling merchandise with the new word. Current vocabulary " like Priesthood broke, File

leader, less active, & courts of love have been created to go along with new policies or to change attitudes.

At times we confound the meaning of words by repeating them without thought. Let's look at the phrase "only true church". I have probably heard this phrase a 1000X in my life -yet never heard anyone drill down on what "true" refers to. Does it meaning the only church that teaches truth, the church with all the truth, the most truth. Does it have anything to do with truth. The third definition of true in my dictionary is "faithful" like true sound which faithfully reproducing the original music OR like an arrow following a true path finds its mark. I believe a true church is "true followers" like Adam having been true and faithful in all things, following an undeviating course to eternal life, obeying all of Gods commandments, faithful to his instructions.

We could easily spend the next two hours just looking at words whose meanings have changed over time. It might be a shorter exercise to look at words that mean exactly what they meant long ago if we could only think of one.

Let's discuss how Language is stabilized and shift this discussion to religion:

Old English, is roughly 1000 years old and I'd give 20:1 odds no person here can understand a single sentence of it. The Book of Mormon is older still, uses words we never use in our everyday conversations yet we assume we understand it's words. We'll test that idea in a minute.

The language of the Nephites was anchored to their scriptures, anchored to the word of God, to the brass plates and to the writings of their prophets. This stabilized the language and countered the tendency for entropy, decay and corruption predicted by the second law of thermodynamics.

Even with the infusion of indigenous people's languages, Mulekite society and Jaredite records, the Nephite language remained far more stable than English has.

For a time English semantics were anchored to Bible usage. Webster's 1828 Dictionary, for example, defined words as they were used by the King James Bible and frequently used Bible quotations to justify the definition.

Today the standard used to produce modern dictionaries is not the Bible. Definitions are untethered from God's word. Popular usage is the standard. In other words our language is largely unanchored - free to float off which ever direction the storm winds blow it.

When enough people use a word in a new way, the dictionaries follow suit. 640 new words were added by Miriam-Webster in 2019, 455 new words were added by October 1st of last year. Webster will add a word to the dictionary when a very small number of people use the word as long as it is considered enough people, for example, do any of you use the word Oobleck? Well enough people do so Webster added it to the dictionary this year. The Global Language Monitor estimates that in the modern world a new word is created every 98 minutes or about 14.7 words per day and the rate of that change is greatly increasing.

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Words shifting meaning is seen by almost everyone who writes about it as natural and harmless. They even use the term “linguistic progression” as if this were progress.

Most authors discussing semantic change do not even hint at a dark side to the corruption of language as Emerson, Locke and Book of Mormon authors do.

In his essay on language, Emerson explains how man, corrupted by impure motives then proceeds to corrupt language: Be patient with this difficult but very insightful quote.

A man’s power to connect his thought with its proper symbol, ...depends on the simplicity of his character, that is, upon his love of truth, and his desire to communicate it without loss. The corruption of man is followed by the corruption of language. When simplicity of character and the sovereignty of ideas is broken up by ...secondary desires, (then he lists the four desires of the church of the devil found in your Book of Mormon).....the desire of riches, of pleasure, of power, and of praise, — and duplicity and falsehood take (the) place of simplicity and truth....]then] old words are perverted to stand for things which are not;...In due time, the fraud is manifest, and words lose all power....”.

Mormon taught that mixing or blending leads to incorrect traditions which leads to destruction. Can I emphasize that again. Incorrect traditions which leads to destruction. You might have thought that Mormon was talking about inter-racial marriage when he was talking about mixing but listen to his words.

“...the Lord God might preserve his people, that they might not mix and believe in incorrect traditions which would prove their destruction.” (Alma 3:8)

Mormon is unconcerned about diluting the genes of some master race but instead about mixing ideas and traditions leading to incorrect traditions which lead to destruction.

The Adversary is behind the destruction. It is he who mixes or mingles the words of scripture with philosophies of men. We were once taught that in our temples. He corrupts language to obscure the truth.

Loads have been written about changing meanings in secular language. Much less has been written about the corruption of language in religion.

In the beginning was the Word. By that word worlds came into existence. The word of God was given to each of the prophets. Enoch “spoke the word of the Lord, and the earth trembled, and the mountains fled — even according to his command — and the rivers of water were turned out of their course, and the roar of the lions was heard out of the wilderness. And all nations feared greatly, so powerful was the word of Enoch, and so great was the power of the language which God had given him.” (Moses 7:13, OC Genesis 4:13)

This is a scriptural description of an important characteristic of the language of the first religion, of pure language: it has power. A corrupted language however “looses all power” in Emerson words.

A few have investigated semantic change in religion. BYU professor John Gee investigated the Book of Mormon claim that discusses the removal “from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious” (1 Nephi 13:26, NC 1 Nephi 3:21). He documents early Biblical scribal omissions, additions, word substitutions, and several kinds of “lexical reinterpretations” the changing of meanings of words. He gives as examples a Greek word [okay, this is the part where I attempt to read Greek and you mock my weakness] a Greek word, (pisteuein) which meant “to trust or rely on” that was changed to mean “to believe;” (Luke 24:25, NC Luke 14:3)(O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken) and a word which meant “to agree to terms” (homologeso) changed to mean “to confess;” (Matt 10:32, NC Matt 5:6) (whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I also confess also before my Father” and the word mysterion changed from “(initiation) rite” to “secret.” Our word “mysteries” as in “avoid the mysteries” or “search the mysteries” derives from this Greek word “mysterion” which originally referred to “rites” R-I-T-E-S. Brother Gee barely scratched the surface. I’d like to take over where he left off.

The confounding of language continued throughout the centuries. By the time Joseph saw the Lord in vision the Lord said the “professors were all corrupt”, teaching “for doctrines the commandments of men” (JS-H 1:19). Much of that “corruption” was the “confounding of language”. The religionists of Joseph day spoke with “a war of words and a tumult of opinions”. Joseph’s words are an accurate description of our own discourse. The restoration restored authority, keys and knowledge, to be sure, but also correct meanings. Consider a few examples:

As part of “the restoration of all things” Joseph restored the meaning of many words whose meaning had become confounded: God, the Second Comforter, heaven, spirit world, spirit prison, hell, Eternal, prophet, seer, revelator, apostle, spirit, soul, intelligence, creation and many, many more. No sooner than Joseph corrected words that had been confounded than men moved again to mess them up.

Jesse W. Crosby relayed this recollection, “when (Joseph) ventured to give his private opinion on any subject of importance his words were often garbled and their meaning twisted and then given out as the word of the Lord because they came from him.”

The garbling of words and the twisting of meaning is a pretty good definition of confounding of language.

Since Joseph’s day the decline in our language has continued and even escalated. We have garbled the meaning of many words in our own LDS church including the word church, even faith, repentance and baptism, prophet, seer, marriage, sealing, adoption, Holy Spirit of promise, apostasy ,worthy, priesthood, authority, ruler, keys, power, hope, & obedience. I can’t even think of a religious word we haven’t confounded.

We use “perfect” to mean flawless, influenced by the Greek understanding. But “perfect” means complete, fully initiated. ‘Be ye therefore flawless’ makes no sense, but complete the journey, that’s something I can understand.

We use “peculiar” to mean strange, odd, or weird but the word as used in the phrase “peculiar people” in 1 Peter 2:9 is derived from the Latin *peculium*, and denotes “a people for God’s own possession” a special possession or property” purchased by His blood.

We use “bishop”, “president” and “apostle” to mean leaders with increasing authority without even considering their original meaning. A president is one who sits before. A bishop is an overseer. An apostle is one sent by the Lord, a messenger of His words. We focus on authority when we think of these words but their meaning, before the confounding, reflects their roles as servants.

“Apostasy” has changed from “When individuals or groups of people turn away from the principles of the gospel” to “acting in clear, open and deliberate public opposition to the church or its faithful leaders...” We have conflated rebelling against God with opposing leaders. By our modern confounded definition —Jesus was an apostate.

“Oracles” have been changed from their original meaning, originally referring to the revelations of God whereas now it is used to refer to the men who hold keys of revelation.

Revelation has changed from its original meaning to pull back the veil (re-velum) to its use today. Any idea that pops into one’s head, any impression may be referred to as revelation in modern use. I would love to see us quit using this word to refer to our impressions. Couldn't we just say “I got an impression” or even more modestly “it occurred to me” rather than “invoke the name of God in vain as if He had part in our every” thought.

We have badly confounded the meaning of prophet, seer and revelator. That is an hour talk right there.

A complete list of words we have confounded with their true meanings would require both more wisdom and voice than I possess. The list covered is enough to begin to see the extent of the problem.

In 2013 One teacher taught, “ but what I want to do is just look at some specific words for a moment. Because I’m telling you the muddle that has been made of the Book of Mormon by the nonsense that we believe about its words is worse than a Gordian knot. And how you sort that out at this point is a challenge“. Do you remember how the Gordian knot was untied?

“Making a muddle of words” is another good definition of the “confounding of language”.

How are we doing for time. I could cut out this next section but you’ve never heard this before and it’s really interesting.

The Book of Mormon contains some archaic words and phrases that go back to Early Modern English. Others have discussed that. I want to talk instead about a few words that were NOT ARCHAIC in 1828 but were modern, understandable words at the time the BofM was published and that subsequently have become confounded.

Less than three centuries after the King James Bible was produced (1611) there was sufficient drift in word meanings that a new translation was needed . It was completed in the 1880s (Revised Version).

In 2019 I predicted “At the rate our language is morphing, we may soon need a revised Book of Mormon to update words no longer comprehensible to an English reader of future decades. “ Little did I know then that project would be started a year later to DO JUST THAT.

Now it’s time to test whether we understand the vocabulary of the Book of Mormon. Here are examples of words beginning with the first five letters in the alphabet A, B, C, D and E. As I introduce each of these words quickly define it in your mind and see just how well you understand these words.

A: APOSTLE- The word apostle is used 15 times in the Book of Mormon. “Apostle” comes from a Greek word apostellein meaning “sent forth” and apostolos meaning “messenger”. Oliver Cowdery considered himself an apostle. So did David Whitmer because God sent them forth. Their understanding has been canonized in LDS scripture. Jesus called them by revelation and in that revelation they were called “apostles”.

And now, Oliver Cowdery, I speak unto you, and also unto David Whitmer, by the way of commandment; for, behold, I command all men everywhere to repent, and I speak unto you, even as unto Paul mine apostle, for you are called even with that same calling with which he was called. ( D&C 18:9, T&C JSH 15:30)

Even today the Oxford dictionary gives as the first definition of apostles “any important early Christian teacher” yet members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have confounded its meaning and restrict its use to an office in a hierarchal priesthood quorum. There is no scriptural language that Paul nor Oliver nor David Whitmer were ever part of the Quorum of Twelve yet they were sent by Jesus as His messenger and were properly called apostles by Christ.

B: BABBLING- The sins Alma list for those out of the church (Alma 1:32, NC Alma 1:6) included “babblings”. In 1832 the principle meaning of “babbling” included “telling secrets”. That meaning has largely been lost and replaced by “talking rapidly in a foolish and in incomprehensible way”.

C: CURIOUS- In 1828 “curious” had the meaning of “wrought with care and art, elegant”, the word being derived from the Latin cura meaning “care” and curiosus meaning “careful”. This can be seen in the Book of Mormon description of the Liahona (curious workmanship) and in the Bible description of “the curious girdle of the ephod” as well as the wording chosen by the eight witnesses as they described the engravings on the plates. Yet today that meaning has been lost from our everyday speech.

D: DISCOVER- “Discover” is a word we use to mean to “find”, “become aware of” or “be the first to observe”. In 1828 Webster’s first three definitions and therefore most common usages are to “uncover” and “lay open to the view”; to “disclose”, “reveal” and “make known”. This most common usage of 1828 is listed in the modern Oxford dictionary but it is considered “archaic”.

The Book of Mormon has the unfamiliar verb syntax “discover to” as in this sentence:

“...that I may discover the abominations of this people to other nations.” (Mosiah 8:12)

This usage of “discover to” meaning “reveal to” would be clear from the Webster 1828 understanding but odd, even jarring from a modern understanding. “Find to” makes no sense.

E: EMBARRASMENTS- This is a fun one. You all know what embarrassments are, it’s when your face turns red, when you have that toilet paper hanging out behind you. In the Book of Alma, Helaman describes his army suffering from a lack of food.

“And now the cause of these our embarrassments, or the cause why they did not send more strength unto us, we knew not...”

This usage of “embarrassment” is definition #2 in the 1828 Webster’s dictionary, namely, “Perplexity arising from insolvency” but has been lost in the modern Oxford dictionary as well as in our own usage.

Here are other examples of Book of Mormon words that no longer mean what they meant in 1828. Aggravate, flatter, goodly (that’s a fun one-I Nephi...

-you never use goodly in your everyday conversations yet we assume it means good and it doesn’t), gross, keep, let, obtain, remain, & try. Many other examples could be cited of how English words chosen for the Book of Mormon have been confounded since 1828 and no longer communicate the original meaning.

So what is the point of knowing that our language is impure, badly corrupted and without power? Am I making a big deal out of nothing here OR is this confounding of language something we need to understand?

In secular language the constant flux of words is often seen as benign, confusing at times, yet somewhat entertaining. In scripture, however, confounding language can be a matter of life and death as Alma points out:

Behold, the scriptures are before you; if ye will WREST them it shall be to your own destruction. (Alma 13:20)

WREST is a word we don’t use everyday. Definition #3 in my dictionary says wrest means to “distort the meaning or interpretation of (something) to suit one’s own interests or views.” Other definitions use the word “force”. Wrestling the scriptures is forcing a meaning out of them not intended by the writers.

Isn’t Alma being overly dramatic here? How could WE force or distort the meaning of the scriptures to our destruction? Let’s make this even more personal. How could you? How could I? distort the meaning of the scriptures to my destruction? To yours? The scriptures have the answer—

— we could teach doctrines which are vain (2 Nephi 28:9) and therefore ineffective, imagining that “at last we will be saved in the kingdom of God.” (2 Nephi 28: 8) and yet not do the things that are necessary to be saved in the kingdom of God

—We could teach more than Christ taught and establish it as His doctrine (3 Nephi 11:40) which we have done, for example, expanding the requirements for baptism beyond His

word. We could teach less than Christ taught and establish it as His doctrine, which we have done (3 Nephi 11:40). In either case “the gates of hell stand open to receive such when the floods come and the winds beat upon them” (3 Nephi 11:40). We could act in opposition to Christ by defining His church to be more or less than he defines it, namely those who repent and come unto Him.

These warnings are for us. They explain how distorting Gods words can result in our destruction.

Well, we should wrap it up.

God is moving to fulfill a prophecy he made.

“And when the times of the gentiles is come in, a light shall break forth among them that sit in darkness, and it shall be the fullness of my gospel, but they receive it not, for they perceive not the light and they turn their hearts from me because of the precepts of men.”

The precepts of men are the confounded language and the confounded doctrine that prevent us from receiving this new light. We have heard light yesterday and today. Will we receive it or will we turn away our hearts out of fear and because of the precepts of men.

There is reason to be hope filled. Zion will be brought again. The city of Enoch will return and the Lord will bring this creation back into his presence.

BUT It is too late to pray that they Lord will not confound our language. No man can untie the Gordian knot of our confounded language nor return us to a language which is pure and undefiled. (Do you recall how the Gordian knot was untied? ) Returning to a pure language will require much more than the weak attempts of men, it will require the sword of the word of God. Only a sword untied the knot and only Christ and his word can return our language to purity. For all who will receive instruction from God, Zephaniah prophesied:

For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent. (Zephaniah 3:9).

That will occur in the Day of the Lord which I pray we may see. Until then I look forward to the pure language Zephaniah prophecies we will turn to.

I long for the time when every man can connect his thought with its proper symbol.

When all men love the truth, and desire to communicate it without loss.

When no words are perverted to stand for things which are not.

And when our words have power.

Until then the best we can do is speak with a confounded language with the spirit of inspiration. The spirit can empower every language. The spirit of inspiration is pure and undefiled by “secondary desires, the desire of riches, of pleasure, of power, and of praise” as Emerson taught. When those things are gone from our souls, Zion is possible and it will be reflected in our words, in our language and in our love for each other.