

IN RETROSPECT,  
ALL IS WELL WITH MY SOUL

Good morning. For those of you who do not know me, I am Tina Hoover. Allow me to give you a brief history of me. I have been a member of this Church since July 1976, and here I am before you this July 2017. In July of 1976, I moved here, Corona del Mar, from the East Coast with my husband and two minor-aged children. In November of 1976, I became a single parent with two minor children. In December of 1986, I married Chuck Hoover in this very Church. Chuck had five adult boys. As a result, I then had seven children. Chuck left this earth on April 10, 2014. Today, I have a total of sixteen grandchildren, five great grandchildren and one on the way. I also have a multitude of brothers and sisters from my faith family with this Church. In retrospect, all is well with my soul.

“In retrospect” – those words resonate with me. I believe there is power in words. Jesus believed that words were powerful, as he was a teacher and his words (particularly the parables) were potent and authoritatively persuasive ... wouldn't you agree? So let's look at this phrase for a second. For me this phrase means “looking back and contemplating past choices of action.” I recently began to actively muse over this phrase about three years ago. It is my habit to revisit my past. It first struck me as a scary thing to do and I challenged myself: “Seriously? Do you really want to see, again and again, what you did back then? Do you really want to revisit some of the idiotic choices you have made? And what can you ... will you ... do about it now?” As you can imagine, I found myself wishing that I had never done some things, or that I had the chance to do them differently. But I also realized that when I look back, sometimes I am not sure whether my choices were all that bad.

I do remember being criticized for ruminating about the past. I was counseled that “living in the present moment” was of the utmost importance (that's another story for another time). Well, I held to my musings because I was not saying that looking at the past is to “re-live” the past. I was “just” saying “look back” – no more, no less. After all, we take pictures, and why do we take pictures if we do not intend to look back? We take pictures in our minds too, so shouldn't we look back in our minds and see what happened?

The critique caused me to research the word “retrospect.” The word most commonly appears as a noun. The word is persuasive for me. It can also be used as a verb – an action word. I like action words. They excite me because they call for action on one’s part – they call for you to *do* something. So, the prefix *retro* means “back,” and *spect* is a component of the words “inspect,” “spectator,” “spectacles” and “perspective,” among others, all of which have to do with *looking* or *seeing* (*really* seeing). Aha, I said to myself, I am on the right path. “Retrospect” means to look back in time; to remember; to contemplate things past; to muse, reflect or intently but calmly duly consider what went on before. “Okay,” you say, “and your point?” Well, I’m getting to that. Indulge me a bit further. Because, in retrospect, I assure you that I will look back on this day and this moment and ask myself: *What were you thinking?*

I admit there was a time when I gave credence to the idea “live in the present moment.” Many books have been written on that premise. However, when Chuck left this earth, leaving me here, the past again became very important to me. I had a lot of memories that I wanted to savor and bring forth. How could I possibly move forward without revisiting what had come before? I was given advice all around to move on. There was no doubt in my mind that I *should* move on. But I am not willing to sweep thirty-eight years with Chuck Hoover under the carpet.

I grew up in Washington, D.C. and many times walked past the National Archives and Records Administration building. In its front is a dramatic sculpture entitled “The Future,” which has a phrase inscribed on its base: THE PAST IS PROLOGUE. Oftentimes I would stare at those words, contemplating their meaning. Then I researched the word “prologue” and learned that a prologue is a preface to a play or novel that “sets the scene” and provides the audience or reader with a little background information on what’s to come. Did you know that the phrase was invented by William Shakespeare and first used in his play *The Tempest*? In that play, Shakespeare intended to send the audience a message that the past is a preface to the future, and that one cannot forget the lessons of history.

In the context of those words, Shakespeare would have us believe that one is destined to perform an act in a certain way. In essence, then, Shakespeare is rationalizing that we are *fated* to act by all that has led up to that moment ... no choice ... “What’s past is prologue.”

Used this way, it implies that everything that came before does not matter because a new and glorious future is out there waiting for us. I disagree. I understand this phrase in an *exact opposite* meaning. I believe that the past is of great importance because it shows us the consequences or results of the acts that we performed. With that material piece of information, we can assuredly define or fashion our present or current action. In that regard, our past acts CAN, but do not necessarily, set the stage for acts we are about to embark upon.

It is in this sense I come to understand that if I fail to SEE the lessons derived of my past acts, then rest assuredly I am doomed (if they are not good acts) to repeat them over and over and over again, with the same result. Sometimes they are good acts or smooth-sailing acts, and I certainly want to know what they are so I *can* repeat them over and over and over again. Or perhaps I learn that what was smooth sailing then is not going to be smooth sailing this time, so maybe I need to take another road. But how can I know any of that if I do not look back?

I recall being taught that one can never go back to undo a choice taken in the past. However, in retrospect, while one can never go back to undo an act, it is entirely possible that one can, in reflection and contemplation, bring the past and its memories forward as a beacon to the acts one is about to take. I wonder if Jesus ever looked back to contemplate or reflect on his past actions. My reading of the Bible makes me believe that he did, because there are many accounts of Jesus going off to pray, reflecting on what preceded the present moment. I believe that while on the cross, Jesus contemplated the acts that preceded the moment and asked, *“My God, why has thou forsaken me?”* I am no theologian, so I will not attempt to interpret the meaning of those words. I simply say I believe Jesus took the time and looked back.

The disciples also looked back in time in order to shape their present actions after Jesus' death. *“So then the Jewish leaders responded, ‘What sign can you show us, since you are doing these things?’ Jesus replied, ‘Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again.’ Then the Jewish leaders said to him, ‘This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and are you going to raise it up in three days?’ But Jesus was speaking about the temple of his body. So after he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the saying that Jesus had spoken.”* (John 2:18-22) This looking

back confirmed for the disciples that they had the strength and the courage to continue to promote the teachings of Jesus.

There are great things to be learned from looking back, my friends. One great turning point for me in looking back was when I discovered Jesus and was able to subsequently develop a relationship with him. In retrospect, I discovered I had overcome some extremely difficult, troubling times. I am here to tell you that those times seemed to hang on forever, and at one point I was convinced I would never rise above them. But I did. It seemed that all of a sudden there was light and no more darkness. How did I do that? The answer came “in retrospect.” In looking back, I realized that in many of my trials, even though I did not know it, Jesus was always there. How do I know this? Well, I talk to Jesus, and I talk to Jesus a lot. We have discussions. And when I listen, *really* listen, I hear him speak to me. His voice comes in a variety of modes and venues.

However, sometimes I talk but I do not listen, because I have a lot to say. I talk to Jesus a lot and listen way too little. One of those times, when I was not understanding or clear with what Jesus was offering me, I got up very early in the morning and walked down to the beach about two blocks from where I live. I was experiencing some trying times and accused Jesus of not hearing my cry or paying attention to what was going on with me. I needed to yell at him in private, so I walked out and climbed over the rocks of the jetty. I was able to get out pretty far, as it was low tide and there was land all around (I was new to California), and there I was, yelling at Jesus, because he really was not listening. As I was having my “heated” and animated discussion, I began to feel water licking my feet and ankles. I suddenly noticed that the tide was coming in, way too quickly. At that time, I did not know how to swim, and I was very, very far out in the ocean. And then I thought: you have two little kids at home who are expecting you to come back. So I apologized and begged, “Please help me off these rocks and get me back on dry land.” I scrambled my way back off the rocks to safe ground (I was wet up to my waist) and safely back to the cliff. Once I got to the top of that cliff, Jesus had my attention. In retrospect, I remember him saying, “Stop and look around you ... I led you to paradise. You could be having these troubles in a less desirable place.” So, I heard him, and I’m still here, and that’s the good news. I came to have a different perspective on my problems and to understand that Jesus was there. In retrospect, looking back, all is well with my soul.

I understand that Jesus is there not in just the difficult times, but also in the smooth times. And I appreciate those times. I appreciate being able to at least define that there are smooth times for me, and those are fairly comfortable times. But I also understand that it is from those difficult times that I learn the most ... that I get the most out of life. I am thankful for the opportunity to be able to look back, because then I can understand and see that those acts that I performed at that time led to a certain result that I was not exactly happy with. And if I am not happy with it, what can I *do* about it? That's why I like action verbs ... I *can* do something. On my best days, I ask Jesus, "What should I do?" And on my best days, I get some really good answers. On other days, I either do not ask him because I know that I know, or I ask but do not listen. And I don't need to tell you what those results are.

I recall the many times I have called on Jesus and accused him of not hearing me, only to find that my burden had in time lifted. Jesus was always there, in smooth sailings and in difficult and trying times. I had gained the strength to carry on that I did not know I had. I found this to be the truth and, for that reason, I need not fear the trying times that confronted me, but only need to pay attention to the details so that when those times do come, I can use those details to formidably shape my present actions. Because I looked back, I discovered that Jesus lives in me. I discovered that I have a hero in Jesus. He had protected me and saved me from impending danger and harm from others, and most importantly from myself. I could not ask for a better friend. I could not ask for a better hero. He was dependable, even when I thought he was not. Jesus *is* dependable, and he is always there. He is consistent. There is no judgment. There is no "If you do this" ... he just does. I no longer have to be afraid of what I am or who I am. For the most part, I can always be happy in my own skin. Sometimes that does not happen, and it's not a very good feeling for me.

In retrospect, Jesus always gave me the answer. As a result, I became confident that the immense sorrow I faced would melt away because Jesus was there giving me the strength to carry on. In retrospect, when I blindly called on Jesus, he was there, urging me to cast my fears aside and trust and believe that I would survive. And I did survive. Jesus said these words: "*Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you shall*

*find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*  
[Your yoke does nothing but burden you and lead you astray.]”  
(Matthew 11:28-29)

I find these words encouraging for my troubled soul. In retrospect, I learned that Jesus wants me to evaluate my life by looking back and giving definition to past burdens ... not fear them. Jesus also wants me to understand and give definition to the smooth-sailing times, knowing I am no longer pulling the cart by myself. Jesus guides our lives in the way that we should proceed. He also said, “*I am the way, the truth and the [light].*” I believe him, because it was in looking back that I learned the essence of those words. Going forward I can trust more, I can ask for more, I can believe more. So now I know hard times will come, and when they do, I do not have to worry because I know I have the strength to carry on ... because Jesus lives in me. Jesus is *my* way, Jesus is *my* truth, Jesus is *my* light. He is a beacon unto my path.

How many of you remember the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*? George Bailey, played by James Stewart, is a man who has given up his dreams of traveling the world in order to help others and has recently fallen on hard times. He is saved from committing suicide by the intervention of a guardian angel named Clarence. Depressed and hopeless, George tells Clarence, “I wish I were never born.” Clarence replies, “You mustn't say things like that,” and then takes George on a journey where George sees just how much he has affected the lives of the people in his small town, and just how different their lives would have been if he were never born. Thinking back to my own struggles and recognizing that Jesus has intervened to help me, wouldn't it be great if all of us had a Clarence? Or more importantly, a Jesus? Well the truth is, all of us *do* have Jesus. We just have to ask, and accept, and believe.

It's easy to look back and punish ourselves for not living up to expectations or for taking the wrong path or for making a not-so-good choice ... because in that way, we justify our actions and do nothing. But in looking back, we *can* do something – that action verb. We can *learn* from looking back at our struggles. We can examine the past acts in order to make an intelligent decision either to never do that again or to modify it or change it in some way. The choice is ours. And we have a perfect hero to consult. (I don't suggest that you yell at him, not in the middle of the ocean anyway.) Whatever you decide, your decision is going to be the result of reflection and thus insightful

as to how you will move into the present. Maybe it will help you give a friend advice, or make someone laugh during a time of struggle by exposing your own difficulties. At any rate, sharing your trying path with someone is proof positive that these things can be overcome, as you say to them, “This is how I did it. Jesus helped.”

Perhaps if we reflect on how our lives have been a gift (including all the mistakes, all the challenges and all the smooth sailings), we can be more effective children of God and share that. I certainly think that in this faith family I am blessed to be a part of, we do that. We do that a lot in our retreats. We do that a lot when we know we can call on someone and say “I need help” or “I need to talk” ... and they are there. We begin to see the world with new eyes. That being said, in retrospect, even my biggest debacles can be brought to light and bring new insight. Indeed, that is when I offer my most earnest prayer ... for in essence, when I look back, I am praying. Prayer takes on a different light when I do it that way.

And so, my friends, that is how I am able to rise above my troubles and how I am able to shape my present acts. For me, the past is indeed prologue. It’s important. It sets the scene for the present moment. As for those stupid and idiotic paths I have chosen and for the difficult times I have experienced, would I do it all over again? I would ... how else would I have gotten to know my Jesus?

Maya Angelou has written many books, and one of them is entitled *Wouldn’t Take Nothing for My Journey Now*. Well, I did not understand that statement for quite a while, and then, in retrospect, I began to understand. And I can say, with joy and gratitude, “I wouldn’t take nothing for my journey ... I wouldn’t change it, not one bit.” In fact, I can say: “Whatever my lot, Jesus has taught me to say ... all is well, all is well with my soul.” Thank you for listening.

Please pray with me.

Jesus, we are travelers in the world, and too easily we get sidetracked. We lose sight of our goals. We get discouraged in our journey and hitch a ride on anything that comes along. And then we push those experiences under the carpet, hiding them, ashamed of them. Help us on our way, Jesus. Deepen our trust in you. We are a curious people searching for meaning and purpose for our lives. Help us to realize it is okay when we go astray ... because we have you, our hero. Help us look back in order to keep turning to the path which leads to fulfillment of the life our Father, God, intends for us. And thank you JESUS for believing in us. You see us as a people of infinite worth. We know you love us. We can do all things because you strengthen us. There is nothing that can happen to us today that we cannot handle with your help. Dear Jesus, show us your ongoing plan for our lives. Lead us, and we will follow.

In the name of Jesus, who walked before us and taught us to pray,  
*“Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.”*