

I am truly honored to be a part of this beautiful and innovative Easter cyber-service.

I come to you as someone who was raised in the Brighamite or Utah branch of the Restoration tradition.

If I am being honest - I will admit to once feeling very proud to be a Rocky Mountain Mormon (so to speak). I will also admit to once thinking of RLDS church members with a bit of unrighteous pride - perhaps dismissing them (you) as our estranged, slightly inferior but lovable step-cousins.

I am embarrassed, but also delighted now to admit that these feelings have evolved over the years - all for the better I believe. Let me explain.

In the early 2000s I experienced an awakening regarding serious problems within my own faith tradition -- important issues related to race, gender equality, historical honesty and integrity, ecclesiastical authority and exclusivity, sexual orientation, poverty and peace. This may sound familiar to you.

During this discovery, I felt largely alone -- for a time. And then, as I discovered others like me, I fancied myself and my small group of "progressive" friends as being slightly ahead of our time - at least by Utah standards.

But make no mistake. Things have often felt hopeless to me, and to us.

Little did we realize that it was we - the Rocky Mountain Mormons - who were, in many instances, the "naive and inexperienced" ones.

And yet, how inspiring it was for me, and for us, to discover that you, our previously supposed "step-cousins" -- who shared all of the same problems -- had grappled with and/or reconciled many of these issues *literally decades* before we even awoke to them.

Did you pay a heavy price for this reconciliation? Yes you did. Was it painful and scary? Undoubtedly.

But it was the right thing to do.

And the buds of your own institutional and communal resurrection are now blossoming - for the rest of us to witness, enjoy, and draw inspiration from.

As one who has admittedly experienced a significant faith crisis in all things religious - I think about what Easter means to me now.

For me, the following words come to mind:

Rebirth. New life. Community. Love. Peace. And perhaps most importantly, hope.

If there is an institution on earth that to me, embodies this true spirit of Easter, it is Community of Christ.

Much like in the Easter story, your community has - in a very real sense - experienced a glorious resurrection. A rebirth that is squarely centered on what I consider to be *essential Christianity*.

As someone who is now trying his best to walk alongside those of my own faith tradition - who are **only now** experiencing this painstaking process of death and rebirth - I can now testify to that which you already know.

This reconciliation is messy. It can often feel dark. Painful. Full of despair, fear, and at times, hopelessness. Both individually, and as a community.

And yet, there is hope. Hope that we can change. Hope that we can do better. Hope that we can not only survive, but in a very real sense, hope that we can *thrive*. As a people.

And in a very real sense, you - Community of Christ - now represent this hope, to us. You embody a people who have experienced this painful death and rebirth, and are now pioneering new ways to embody the central tenets of Christianity. As we are witnessing this very day.

No. You never were our slightly inferior, but lovable step-cousins. In fact, you were and are our experienced, thoughtful, wise, and compassionate full-fledged siblings. Our brothers and our sisters.

And as one of the many somewhat humbled Rocky Mountain Mormons - on this Easter morning, I thank you, WE thank you, from the bottom of our hearts, for giving us a reason to hope for a brighter day.

John Dehlin, Ph.D.
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