The Power of the Priesthood to Release a Suffering Ward Member: The passing of Bus Gillespie

It was fast Sunday in the Edgemont 7th ward and I had fasted for a very specific purpose that day. My good friend and recent Bishop of the 7th ward, Bus Gillespie was nearing the end of his battle with leukemia/cancer and was lapsing in and out of consciousness. I had visited him that week in his home and could tell that the end was near. It also was very hard on Susan to see him in this painful part of his decline.

I felt impressed to fast for Heavenly Father's mercy to attend Bus. Specifically, I had prayed that He might let him pass quickly. As Sunday morning dawned, I picked up the phone and asked Susan if she was okay with a thought that had come to me as I had fasted. I told her that I wanted the High Priests of the ward to pray for his release. Would she be okay with that? She graciously thanked me for thinking of Bus and said she would be honored to have the High Priests praying for his release. She also added that she and her children had been fasting that weekend for the exact same thing.

We proceeded with our worship that day, and we reached the third hour which was Relief Society/Priesthood meetings. I was conducting the High Priests that morning and in our announcements it was mentioned that Bus wasn't doing well. We then turned the lesson over to our quorum teacher and he taught us for the rest of the hour. As he concluded I rose to thank him and then to ask for someone to give the closing prayer. But rather than ask a random brother to close our meeting, I paused and shared with our twenty five High Priests how our beloved brother Bus was suffering at that very moment at his home. I then looked out at my fellow brothers and my eye landed on a long time quorum member, Lance Reynolds, who was seated in the back row. Impulsively I asked Lance if he would lead us in prayer and specifically to remember our good brother Bus. What followed was perhaps the most heartfelt public prayer I have ever heard.

As Lance began his prayer he went right to the obvious concern. As best I can remember he prayed the following words. "Dear Heavenly Father, as the High Priests of the Edgemont 7th ward, we come before thee in fasting and prayer this Sabbath morning. And our hearts are heavy with the pain and discomfort that our beloved friend and brother, Bus Gillespie is experiencing this morning. Now Father, we know that is your power alone that can give life and that can take it away or allow it to be taken away. But we want you to know that we twenty five High Priests are pleading with you to release our dear friend from his mortal probation. He has served so valiantly in this life. He has helped us to raise our children in this ward. He has led this ward spiritually and physically. He has even helped to build the building that we are meeting in this hour. So, if we can merit any grace in your presence, please hear our prayer and release our good brother from his suffering. We thank you for blessing us with this noble brother, and we leave our request with you this morning and do it in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen." After Lance concluded his prayer, most of us just remained for a moment to savor the spirit that was in that room. Some were weeping, others just pondering that sacred time.

I exited the meeting and after rejoining my wife we drove home together. On the way I related to her the remarkable experience that we had had with Lance's prayer. She listened and then said, you should go home and record those feelings so that you can share them with Susan. I took her advice and recorded as best I could what had transpired. While I was writing my thoughts a phone call came informing us that Bus had passed away within the hour.

As I finished my account I then took a copy of my reflections over to Susan to share with her. As I sat down with her and she read my narrative she began to weep. As she looked up she exclaimed, “this morning Bus began to just gasp for air as if someone were choking him. It was so bad that I called hospice around 11:30 and asked them to come over. They said that he would pass soon, but that they would come and try to give him a shot to calm him down physically. She then said, just shortly before noon Bus began to thrash and it was just awful. I wondered what I could do for him. Then all of a sudden he became calm again, and then ten or so minutes later he passed away. With tears streaming down her face she said, “Lance’s prayer was given at about 5 minutes to 12 and first Bus calmed and then he quietly passed to the other side. Thank you and all the High Priests for their faith in releasing Bus. We are just so grateful for his passing.”

I have often reflected on the verse in James which reads, “And the prayer of the righteous man availeth much.” I have witnessed this many times in my life. But the ‘prayer of righteous men’ I will forever associate with the passing of Bus Gillespie and the faith of 25 fellow High Priests.