

Living Scriptures

Scott Hales

Timothy smiles as he hands a five-dollar bill to the teenager behind the window. “Keep the change,” he says. The teenager—a red-headed seventeen-year-old with almost as many piercings on her face as freckles—giggles and gives him a towering vanilla ice cream cone and a stack of brown paper napkins.

“You’re gonna need these on a day like today,” she says. She is referring to the heat, a staple of mid-July days in Palmyra, and Timothy has to remind himself once again how bothersome a blazing sun can be to mortals. It has been almost two millennia since he last felt the sun’s rays on his skin, and he has become unused to feeling a sensation so . . . trivial. At first he had missed it—almost to the point of regretting his decision—but now he understands why he must go without such distractions.

Jeremiah, ever-cryptic in his aphorisms, put it best when they were tending to wounded civilians in India during the Sepoy Rebellion: “Suffering determines the length of a lifespan.” Having died once himself, the victim of a brutal stoning, Timothy knew immediately what his friend meant. The body can only take a certain amount of pain—physical, emotional, spiritual—before it gives up the ghost. Death is the spirit’s rejection of suffering, and no physical body, no matter how strong or righteous, can contain its spirit when pain tips the scales. Had they not been made to withstand the most harrowing conditions of the Fall, they could not fulfill their divinely-appointed mission.

Or eat an extra-large ice cream cone without guilt or threat of a heart attack.

Using the last of the napkins to wipe melted ice cream from his hands and lips, Timothy decides to visit Grandin's printing press for the first time since he'd helped E. B. Grandin—then only a brash kid!—set up shop in the 1820s. So much has changed in Palmyra since then, changes that cause Timothy to remember a *Church News* article about the most recent renovation of the building: an overhaul of the interior that, by Timothy's best guess, probably made it almost unrecognizable to those who had known it almost two hundred years ago. Still, Timothy harbors no love for the old interior—Grandin had had no decorative sense—so he doubts he'll be terribly disappointed by what he'll find. He is simply looking for a good way to kill a few hours before he needs to be in place to save the life of the actor playing Jesus in the pageant tonight.

Pushing past a contingent of anti-Mormons with loud yellow signs, Timothy takes in the crowd milling outside an LDS bookstore beside the historical site. Tourists all, they move in a kind of chaotic order, juggling strollers, cameras, shopping bags, and sunburns. Their whiteness—or, more accurately, pinkness—shocks him, so used he is to working in parts of the world where pale skin belongs to the minority. He laughs at their insipid legs and comfortable waist-lines—not spitefully, but with the amusement of one who has seen their kind rise and fall with every century. He wishes Jeremiah and Kumen could be there, especially Kumen, who would probably say something like, "And for this we wander!"

Thinking of Kumen, Timothy almost doesn't hear the eager voice address him. Turning, he sees the tightly grinning face of a well-dressed young man sitting at a table with a display of colorful scripture-themed books and DVDs arranged upon it. "Hello, brother," the young man says. "How would you like a free DVD to share with your family?" Timothy holds up a hand to wave away the offer, but the young man gestures toward an empty seat. "It won't take more'n two minutes, brother. Hear me out and you get a free DVD."

"I've really got to keep moving," says Timothy apologetically.

"Let me ask you this," says the young man. "Are you concerned about the growing wickedness of the world?"

“Of course,” says Timothy.

“And aren’t you worried about the worldliness and immorality on television these days?”

“Television?” The word sounds ridiculous on Timothy’s tongue. As he says it, heinous scenes of barbarous torture and debauchery—memories of darker times of terror and apostasy—flash across his mind. The bloody shadows almost chill him. “No,” he says sharply, “not really.”

The tight smile briefly leaves the young man’s face before two weeks of sales training kick in and he recovers it. Still, Timothy notices a slight tremble surface on the young man’s smooth jaw. He feels slighted, challenged, no doubt feeling as he had as a missionary when people had rejected his invitation to learn more about the Gospel. In the young man’s eyes, now cold with offense, Timothy discerns a weariness, a longing to be somewhere other than a sweltering sidewalk in upstate New York. While Timothy cannot identify with the youth’s desire to sell that which is of no worth, he sympathizes with the weariness. It is what he would feel if he could still feel.

“How much for your DVDs?” Timothy asks.

The young man gives what seems to Timothy to be an unreasonable price.

Reaching for his wallet, Timothy takes the empty seat beside him. “Let’s do this,” he says. “I want you to give a full set of DVDs and books to the next family you talk to. On me.” He pulls a wad of bills from his wallet and hands them to the young man. “Keep the change,” he adds.

The young man counts the bills, speechless. Timothy rises from the chair and replaces his wallet in the back pocket of his cargo shorts. “Make sure it’s a family,” he says to the young man. “I don’t want you giving the DVDs to just anyone.”

“OK,” says the young man.

“And, for the record,” Timothy says, pointing to the flashy image of an ancient prophet on the cover of the nearest DVD, “no self-respecting Nephite would ever dress like that. Not in my day, at least.”



Amy Jorgensen
An Apple A Day, Day 10 (2014)
Archival pigment prints, 5x5 inches

“Each day, an apple was partially eaten—sometimes a tiny little bite; sometimes almost consumed to the core—then discarded onto a stained floor and hit by a sledge hammer. According to Maksym, the images were ‘shot in a way to suggest decay, repulsion and unsanitary conditions.’” —Esmé Thomas