

I'VE GOT A FEELING

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My dad gave me Hugh Nibley while I was in high school. His writing seemed to be a place set for me at the table of Mormonism. I dug into Nibley's work and quoted my findings in seminary, in church, in the middle of lunch at school. (I didn't have very many friends.) Hugh Nibley was delightful to me because he was so much more like the conversations I had at home than many of the lessons I was taught during Sunday school.

An institute teacher gave me *Dialogue* in college. I experienced the same thrill I'd felt the first time I'd sat down to read Nibley's *Temple and Cosmos*. I felt like I belonged. It wasn't that I agreed with everything Nibley wrote, or every essay I read in *Dialogue*. (Unless of course, it was one that you wrote. In which case: Agree. Endorse. Will read again.) It was something so much bigger than finding people with the same world view. Rather, I felt sustained by the endeavor I found both Nibley and *Dialogue* engaged in—fingernails dirty from digging in the loam, seeds planted and ideas raised up to the light. The fact that some ideas never bore fruit seemed secondary to me.

So, being asked to speak at Dialogue Symposium was very much a sort of full circle thrill.

I imagine most of the things presented here today will be well cited, thoroughly researched, peer-reviewed, and life's work supported.

I haven't got any of that.

In fact, once I realized that committing to talk here meant I actually I had to talk here, my first question was, "Wait. What have I got?"

I emailed an academic friend of mine.

"What should I talk about?"

His response was six paragraphs long. I had to Wikipedia twelve of the names and three philosophies he mentioned.

Which seems like a talk in itself, right?

What does it mean to be a thinking woman in the Mormon community when you don't have letters before or after your name? When you don't have the time or inclination to devote hours of your day to research and writing. When you can't find community with the intellectuals because you can't quote, well, one of those names I had to Wikipedia. And you can't find community with the "traditional" Mormon woman because you're processing grey when she sees black and white and besides, you never really liked casserole anyways.

But then, that's kind of a gross simplification, isn't it? How many women do I know that see only light and dark? And when was the last time someone served me a casserole?

So maybe my talk was there! I could stand here as the Everyday Mormon Woman. The one that questions what she hears over the pulpit but stays in the Church. The one that puts on her garments and hopes for a better understanding someday. The one that agitates in her heart rather than the streets. The one that believes fiercely in much of it and is passionately disheartened by the rest. The kind of woman I meet in loud gatherings and across quiet emails almost every day.

But now that I mention it, that all sounds kind of radical. Maybe there is no "Everyday Mormon Woman." So maybe I talk about that. Maybe I talk about the kind of woman I am, how it feels to be a feminist in a patriarchal faith. But then that's complicated, too. I've been told by the People Who Know that I am not quite feminist enough to claim the title. And of course, I've been told by the *other* People Who Know that I am too feminist to claim many other titles. The fact that both groups of knowing people come from within my faith makes my head spin a little faster than it generally does on its own. I am currently too morning sick to deal with either group's gravitational pull.

So.

I don't have the research, I don't have the "Everyday," and as many will tell you, I don't have the right.

I've just got a feeling.

My head is where it usually is, stretching up until it cracks the top off of our house. Bricks crumble, plaster falls, and that old roof is just a hat with shingles. And I think, "Maybe that's all it ever was?" I wonder briefly if the roof on my head will still protect my children from the rain.

My neck continues pushing upward, until all I see is black and bright and all I breathe is stardust. When I look below me I can see what I knew and in the space that surrounds me I can feel what I don't know. (Here's the part where I want to make a pun about it being a heady experience, but I won't. You're welcome.)

I've got a feeling about the individual lights that carve my individual world out of the darkness.

I've got a feeling that theology matters because the questions we ask our sacred texts are nearly as important as the answers they give.

I've got a feeling that while the canon, and the documents that support it, may change over the years—while this may be par for the course—we've got a big problem if many of those changes work to put women in the place a narrative would have them rather than the place God would have them. We do not have to trust change that obscures truth or heritage.

I've got a feeling that I need women to plant their feet on the ashes of their hearthstones and declare themselves priestesses of their working temples, acolytes of our God.

I've got a feeling there are plenty dirtying their soles doing just that in the present, the past, and the future.

I've got a feeling that woman labors until we are each born of her in a flood of water and blood and Spirit. And I wonder, I wonder, I wonder how this is often lost as a sign and a token and an ordinance

and a covenant and a marker of She Who Is Holy and She Who Can Speak and We Who Should Listen.

I've got a feeling that my sisters—the women who gather round tables after children have gone to bed, the women who ask, “You, too?” on quiet car rides after long talks, the women who read and pray and study and nurture and ache and bleed and burn and balm—have really been prophetesses and priestesses all along.

I've got a feeling that when rights are lost, wrongs are embraced.

I've got a feeling about the things I think are inferior, the folklore of modern Mormonism I'm sure I've grown beyond. Hear me out. An example. Oils. Those oils—the ones that are tied up with MLMs, that lamentable scourge of Mormon culture. I know! And I know what most of my academic friends think of them, I've heard about it on Facebook threads and in conversation. The silly women who would cure illness with lavender. Between you and me, I don't really believe in all that stuff, either. (And this is all between us, isn't it?) At my worst, I've laughed too. And then, at my best, I've cried.

Do you remember, dear brothers and sisters? That there was a time when we women were instructed to heal with the Holy Anointing Oil? Has it occurred to none of us that maybe our sisters bathe their children with lavender because some ancestral memory moves their hands from child to oil and back to child again? That good things left behind will fallow? And that a religion that began by embracing folkways cannot purge them—or the women who would extract power from them—as easily as we all hoped? Why did we hope for that? What if we gave our sisters the Oil of Her Tree back? What healing would happen then?

I've got a feeling that I could be all wrong about all sorts of things, and that is all right.

I've got a feeling that I am safe with my God and safe with your God, too.

I've got a feeling that my Mormonism—my truth, my pull into the eternities, my push into the present—cannot, should not, be separated from yours. That we can do this together, that we must do this together,

that our dissonance makes a wild noise heavenly beings will tune until we match their celestial pitch.

I've got a feeling that we can decide there are some truths worth shattering over, or we can decide there are some comforts worth building upon.

I've got a feeling that I am not going to be ashamed of my feelings anymore. That I am going to say the things the Spirit gives me with the authority of a daughter created in the likeness of her Mother. That there is progression between the kingdoms and the Spirit is She and there is more to come and any one of us may receive it all.

I've got a feeling that there are many narratives but few truths and I get to choose the ones that bring me closest to the light.

I've got a feeling that I am going to plant my feet on the ashes of my hearthstone and raise my hands to God.

I've got a feeling that my birthright is my authority and my authority is my birthright.

I've got a feeling that maybe none of these feelings really matter. That the stardust will accumulate in my nostrils and the grass will grow up around my toes until I've forgotten about the blood that connects my head to my feet. I'll grow cold and still and quiet. And then. And then. Warmed by the fire I forgot I held in my hands, my heart will beat again. And I will finally know what I did not know.

I've got a feeling we are here to love and be loved and to forgive and be forgiven and from that truth all else will expand until there is enough space between the stars for every single one of us.

I've got a feeling.

And as odd as it may seem. *Dialogue*—with its intellectuals and academics and citations I never read—is one of the things that has given me the permission to stand here and feel that feeling is enough.

This talk was delivered at the Spirit of Dialogue conference, celebrating Dialogue's fiftieth anniversary, on September 30, 2016.