

Treasure in the Attic

Allow me tell about a tender mercy that I received in the year 2000.

While I served as bishop, in about 1970, our ward members were in the process of remodeling the old Miller ward building. While cleaning out the attic we discovered a glass-covered antique painting, hidden under a very thick layer of dust. I was intrigued by what I saw. It was a magnificent painting of Jesus with seven disciples. A painting that none of us had ever seen before or since. It depicted the Savior of the World following the crucifixion. The is what the painting depicts: Jesus has recently been taken-down from the cross and is being carried, feet first, to the tomb. His face is framed between auburn shoulder length hair and a full beard. His head—highlighted by a ray of sunlight shining softly through a darkened overcast sky—lolls forward in death while his arms hang lifelessly at his side. At the left of the painting are two grieving men whose strong hands bear the weight of Jesus and pull him along in the folds of a white shroud, while a third, nearer the middle, looks resentfully into an unseen crowd. On the far right—in the throes of exquisite mourning—are four women whose fervent anguish is frozen forever in paint. I was impressed by colors that were radiant, yet somber; by technical perfection that was almost photographic, and a splendid composition.

The five-inch solid wood frame was magnificent in its own right, and the thin, darkened, wooden slats that backed the painting attested to its age. I was enthralled by what I saw and sought to identify the painter. After some digging I discovered that it was a masterpiece by Antonio Ciseri—an Italian master. It hangs in a famous museum in Italy and it is so large that it nearly fills the wall upon which it hangs.

Several of our ward members, repulsed by a painting that depicted death—even the Savior’s death—resented having it displayed in the ward building, and so I took it with me when I was called to be stake president, and it hung prominently in my office for 11 years. A new stake president was called in 1992 and I lost track of the painting until July of that year when I received a call from the presidency. “We are remodeling the stake center”, I was told, “and are replacing all of the old art work with new. We know that you are fond of the painting of Christ that hung in your office so long, and we wondered if you would like to own it?”

“Would I like to own it?” I heard my lips utter softly, “well...yes...that would be nice...”; *(that was my outward calm, but inwardly I was barely able to contain my excitement. The artist in me tumbled excitedly into the*

air with fists extended and cried: “would I like to own a one hundred-year-old painting by an old master?! Would a 16-year-old jock like to own a Ferrari? Would a starving man like an invitation to Thanksgiving? Of course I would like to own it!”) But concealing my true feelings I calmly continued, “Where is it now?”

Shortly after his call President Samuelson brought it to my home. I was shocked when he told me that they would have given it to Deseret Industries if I had not wanted it.

It now hangs in my office at home, a sweet reminder of the overwhelming splendor of Christ’s love. A reminder that He loves me—and you, and all his children—enough that he was willing to die that we may live again. Love lies at the very heart of everything that important in the world, and I am always grateful for this splendid visual reminder.