

A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered-Down

Thursday, August 13, 2020

What If?

In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, and your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days and they will prophesy. —Acts 2:17-18

There are a lot of what-ifs. The biggest what-if is 'What if we don't try?'
—Robert Lombardi, executive director of the PIAA

What if? This phrase is something of a verbal Rorschach test which draws out the personality of the one questioned. What sort of response does it elicit from you? Three kinds of responses come to my mind. Some will answer “what if” with hopeful and rosy possibilities. The question can also bring a response of silly things and fantasies, like “What if cows could fly?” Then there are the worrisome “what ifs” which catalog all kinds of possible troubles.

For most of us “what if?” is a question applied to possible failures or troubles, and this is not necessarily a bad thing! As we make plans, or simply go about our daily routines we ask ourselves a host of “what ifs” to be sure that trouble, even danger, is averted. “What if someone is coming around this blind corner at a high rate of speed?” A good “what if”! The Proverbs applaud those who can anticipate trouble and respond wisely. *A prudent man sees danger and takes refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it.* (Proverbs 22:3, 27:12, and is similar to several others!) “What if” is a handy question to carry through life!

Of course, this question can become toxic with worrisome overuse. My brother the engineer tells me that his job was to be the professional worrier, pointing out and studying every possible problem which a project might develop. That's what engineers do, and we can be glad for these folks every time we drive over a bridge or use a household chemical. But even engineers can get carried away. My brother tells me that in every project there comes a time to shoot the engineer and then proceed. (And please don't shoot my brother. Besides, he's now retired.) Too many worried “what ifs” can paralyze.

Cautious “what ifs” can serve a real and helpful purpose, but it is crucially important that we become equally proficient in the art of the positive “what if.” Since the onset of the virus many congregations and organizations were quick to identify all the possible dangers of the pandemic, and out of a deep concern for all these potential perils cancelled all activities for the next three years. (Okay. I exaggerate, but there are those who have presumed the very worse.) On one level this seems a wise act of

foresight, and their grim predictions may very well come true. But is this God's desire and is it the path of life?

It is with deep pride that I have been watching the leadership of St. Luke's through these discouraging days. It would have been easy to have made grand rulings back in March that all was to be cancelled into next year, and these folks could have felt very smart in doing so, while eloquently reciting all the dangers of the virus. They did cancel what needed to be cancelled, and took all the precautions seriously, but they did not let that become the end of the story! Both our *Lunch with Luke* team and the Spring Festival folks kept their hopes alive and made plans for later down the road. What if the virus abates by then, or a vaccine appears soon, or a successful treatment is found? These hopes did not emerge as we would have liked. After months of delay both the festival and the lunch were placed on indefinite postponement. Some might say that time and energy were wasted in the deliberations, but I say that hope was properly being honored.

These are nightmarish kinds of days for those planning organized sports and I was deeply impressed by a quote I saw a few weeks back from Robert Lombardi, the head of the PIAA. *The biggest what-if is 'What if we don't try?'* They are doing all they can to keep the game going. This plan just might fail miserably and need to be scrapped, but they are trying! I like that. Mr. Lombardi has blessed me with a lesson in faith and hope. These are hard days for optimists, and you may have tried lining up a dozen positive "what ifs" in search of a possible endeavor for these stagnated days, only to be reminded that the virus is capable of knocking down a whole host of hopeful plans. But let us not allow the virus to have the last word.

Let us pray for continued vision and the ability to see new possibilities—new "what ifs." Our Vacation Bible School pioneered some new territory with our virtual VBS. Amen. May God send a few more visions and dreams our way.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

O God, the author and fountain of hope, enable us to rely with confident expectation on thy promises, knowing that the trials and hindrances of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed, and having our faces steadfastly set towards the light that shineth more and more to the perfect day; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

—A Devotional Diary

Comfort, we ask you, most gracious God, all who are cast down, and faint of heart amidst the sorrows and difficulties of the world: and grant that, by the quickening power of the Holy Spirit, they may be lifted up to you with hope and courage, and enabled to go upon their way rejoicing in your love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. —Richard Meux Benson, 1824-1915