

A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered-Down

Tuesday, September 8, 2020

Ten Thousand 'Boo-Boo Strips'

On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. —Revelation 22:2

Do no violence to the place where the righteous live; for though they fall seven times, they will rise again; but the wicked are overthrown by calamity. —Proverbs 24:15-16

As a young person looking ahead to a full life and career, I recall occasional anxieties regarding how I might fare. While in divinity school I would hear stories of young pastors leaving ministry because of some great traumatic church conflict or disaster. "Could that happen to me?" I wondered. Life moved on and God has been good as I was spared any such crisis of a grand scale. As the years rolled by, I learned that great disasters do occur, but that these are seldom the troubles which do the greatest harm to our lives. In fact, it is often the larger crises which give us a greater sense of focus, energy and meaning in life. The real challenge in life is the little stuff! It is the minor aggravations, the little setbacks, the stresses, annoyances, heartaches and headaches which all add up and threaten to do us in. These problems can accumulate until we begin to feel that we are dying the legendary "Death by a Thousand Cuts"! As my life has progressed, I have become less concerned about big disasters and have learned much about taming the armies of little problems which appear to be the greater threat to my sanity and wellbeing.

For most of us this OVID assault has been that threat of a thousand cuts. (I say this with a *major* word of understanding to the minority for whom this crisis *has* meant major losses, such as the loss of a loved one or financial collapse.) Especially since our moving to the "green" status, which *implies* a return to normal, life has been a relentless parade of reminders that all has *not* returned to normal, and in so many ways we are still miles from recovery. Many of us can gather for worship, but cannot sing and get close as we so desire. Most have been spared major income loss, but most have suffered some financial loss through it all. The many social gatherings and seasonal and holiday traditions we so long for are taken from us. Any sort of journey or errand now becomes fraught with anxieties over our safety and the precise precautions we should be taking. The aggravations and hurts may each, by themselves, seem manageable, but they also seem endless and numerous. What's a believer to do?

As with any life challenge, the situation is never as unique as we first think. Life has always been an unrelenting string of challenges. Israel's years in the wilderness, or the early Church in Acts come to mind, as God's people were never without an enemy to engage. When we think of our Lord and Savior we naturally focus upon his Passion and Resurrection victory, but before this great battle and victory there were countless small conflicts and triumphs. As a young man discovering the ongoing nature of life's conflicts, I was delighted to discover Proverbs 24:16: *though they [the righteous] fall seven times, they will rise again; but the wicked are overthrown by calamity.* The witness of true faith and the power of the Holy Spirit is not only in a single great defeat and a great comeback. It is about continually being knocked down and continually rising again. This is Resurrection power in the believer's life!

During this past summer's Vacation Bible School, I was sweetly reminded of another answer to the "Death by a Thousand Cuts" that the world loves to dish out upon the believer. Our lessons focused upon the trees of faith, first the Tree of Life in the Garden, then the tree of Calvary, and finally upon the Tree of Life which we find again in the glorious City of God, the New Jerusalem. Revelation 21 and 22 present a gorgeous picture of our final destiny and I highly recommend them for your study and joyful meditation. We are told that the tree in the great city is fruitful, bearing twelve crops of fruit. This is a delightful promise of God's gracious provision for His people. Then there comes a more mysterious promise which we commonly overlook: *and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.* Sweet fruit we understand, but what are we to make of these healing leaves?

The aloe leaf has been used for soothing of burns and wounds and I suppose that a leaf could be used to cover a wound, sealing out exposure to air and offering a relief from the sting. The leaves being for the healing of the nations will probably remain a mystery, but I do know this about leaves. Trees have plenty of them, and in just a month or so we will be reminded of this as they fall and accumulate. These days I look up to the trees—they are especially beautiful creations—and take careful notice of the abundance of leaves. There are tens of thousands on just one tree! That's a lot of band-aids for a badly cut people. The message is one of comfort. Like Mom's endless supply of boo-boo strips which were always able to provide us comfort in our cut and scrape prone childhoods, so the Lord knows our thousand cuts, and is preparing a healing for each one.

Life keeps dishing out troubles and hurts, and this season has an extra abundance of woes, but God never runs out of healing bandages! Be sure to notice a few grand trees today, and as you try to count the leaves, remember the promise of the Tree in the City of God.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

*Come ye disconsolate, where e're ye languish; Come to the mercy seat,
fervently kneel;
Here bring your wounded hearts, here tell your anguish;
Earth has no sorrow that heav'n cannot heal.*

*Joy of the desolate, Light of the straying, Hope of the penitent, fadeless and
pure,
Here speaks the Comforter, tenderly saying, "Earth has no sorrow that
heav'n cannot cure."*

*Here see the Bread of Life; see waters flowing, Forth from the throne of
God, pure from above;
Come to the feast of love; come, ever knowing, Earth has no sorrow but
heaven can remove.*

—Thomas Moore and Thomas Hastings