

A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered-Down

Tuesday, October 13, 2020

Lord, Make Me a Contented Goat

*Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines;
though the produce of the olive fails and the fields yield no food;
though the flock is cut off from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation.
God, the Lord, is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, and makes me tread upon the heights.*

To the leader: with stringed instruments. —Habakkuk 3:17-19

In recent devotional readings I joyously rediscovered the final verses of the Prophet Habakkuk's book. The version I was reading spoke of the deer, but I remembered the Revised Standard rendering which was a tad more poetic:

he makes my feet like hind's feet, he makes me tread upon my high places.

What a gorgeous picture and message of hope! The prophet was awaiting the invasion of the Babylonians, knowing that the results would not be good, but he trusted that God would see him through it all. Rocky terrain lay ahead, but God would give the strength and agility to walk through it all unharmed! What a vision and prayer for our day.

As far as firsthand experience goes, I am not familiar with the hind, nor mountain deer, or even the mountain goat, but you may recall my telling of a neighbor's goat which was quite an inspiration to me a few years back. I would often take my daily run down this farmer's road, and one day I was shocked to see a goat standing on the shed roof. This was a sizeable shed with a steep roof, and I would guess that he was perched about 20 feet above ground level. My initial response was one of fear and concern for this endangered goat, but my fear soon turned to laughter and amusement, then amazement, as I realized that this critter was secure, relaxed and most content in his present situation. I never figured out how he got up there, but he did so on many occasions, and my neighbor apparently cared little for the condition of his shed roof.

My visit to Habakkuk brought this all back to mind and soon I was praying, "Lord, make me like that contented goat!" (Granted, that is not as poetic as praying to be like a hind, but it's my prayer and I am sticking to it!) We all seem to be passing through unnerving territory. In these anxious days we look around us and fear our falling into illness, financial loss, isolation, sadness and loss of hope. Oh, that God would make us

able to look down upon those troubles with confidence instead of fear. “Lord, make us like that goat!”

This prayer has extra special meaning to me as I have dealt with fear of heights in my earlier years. I have learned to moderate much of that fear by pushing myself into uncomfortable situations and gradually learning greater confidence. A stint on the fire department was a real help. I have also discovered that it is important to fully overcome a fear by learning to relax in that situation. If one is to be at a height for any period of time, such as doing a roof replacement, one must learn to do it without a clenched jaw, or that will be a very long and exhausting day!

“Lord, make us like that goat.” Teach us the confidence and peaceful spirit that is necessary if we are to go the distance. Like my four-legged friend, make us relaxed and sure, but always vigilant for any special challenges or troubles which come our way. Yes, there are real dangers below and around us, but God has firmly set our feet!

Let me conclude with a word of endorsement for our music department. (Boy I miss you choirs!) Habakkuk’s book of prophecy concludes with musical instruction! Apparently, the book, or at least the final portions, were to be set to music and sung. There are more songs in the Bible than just the psalms. Previously I have brushed this final remark as a mere notation which was of no relevance to the text. I was wrong. God’s truth and our prayers to God often need to be sung. Although I am not aware of any musical settings for this prophecy, I am aware of countless songs of faith. In these days, let us sing! There is more power to the music of faith than we realize.

I continue to lift my prayer, and now, if anyone calls me “an old goat,” I will take it as a supreme compliment. I may even burst into song!

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

O Holy Spirit, give me faith that will protect me from despair, from passions, and from vice; give me such love for God and men as will blot out all hatred and bitterness; give me the hope that will deliver me from fear and faint-heartedness. —Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Make us, O blessed Master, strong in heart, full of courage, fearless of danger, holding pain and danger cheap when they lie in the path of duty. May we be strengthened with all might by thy Spirit in our hearts.

—F. B. Myer, 1847-1929