

A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered Down

Thursday, October 22, 2020

Defiant Memories

*As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When shall I come and behold the face of God?
My tears have been my food day and night,
while people say to me continually, 'Where is your God?'
These things I remember, as I pour out my soul:
how I went with the throng and led them in procession to the house of God,
with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival.
Why are you downcast, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.*

—Psalm 42:1-6

“Are we there yet?” This question from the backseat, usually repeated numerous times, has roused much frustration among countless parents, but in these days as we all find ourselves feeling trapped in the seemingly endless journey through COVID, we may feel a little more sympathy for this inquiry and plea. Like our children on vacation, frustrated with the apparently endless trip, we cry out, “When will this be over?” Good question! Obviously, we do not know that answer, but we do have some great guidance from a fellow traveler on finding strength for this journey, and it is much better advice than counting cows.

The psalmist who gave us Psalms 42 and 43 (Though separated in our Bibles, they are apparently one psalm) awaited his return home, and from that painful time of waiting was able to offer God’s people help in that difficult ordeal. As best as we can discern, this song was composed by one of the Sons of Korah, a Temple worker, who found himself in exile and deeply longing for return to Jerusalem. The psalmist’s longing for return has much to offer us in our longing for a return to virus-free days.

He began with lament. With candor and passion, he poured out the sadness of his soul and made clear to God his deep longing. He was not at all pleased to be away from the Temple and made that discontent no secret. Have you taken time to lament? Don’t be shy about letting God know your sadness and your desire. Yes, there is a time to put on a happy face and say, “We will get through this just fine!” but there is also a time to let God know that our hearts are breaking. Lament, the pouring out of sadness to God, is an important and necessary starting point, but it is not our destination!

Having made clear his discontent, the psalmist makes a bold affirmation. ***These things I remember***, as I pour out my soul: how I went with the throng and led them in procession to the house of God, with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival. He freely extolled his glad memories of a happier, earlier day in Jerusalem! Joyfully he told of the good old days when elbow to elbow with other enthused worshippers he made his way into the Temple courts while gladly singing praises. He remembered and relished a joyful past.

Is this good? Is this wise? We can be quick to criticize those who seem to be caught up in memories of “the good old days.” We commonly accuse such folks as not living in the present and of being caught up in wishful thinking, but the psalmist freely exulted in the past. He would probably tell us to loudly recount the glad ministries at St. Luke’s and how we once fed 120 people a week at *Lunch with Luke*, hosted up to 60 children at our Vacation Bible Schools, filled the pews for Christmas and Easter celebration, and freely rubbed elbows with no fear of illness! Are we wise to so zealously recount these recent wonderful days? The wise of this world take great pride in their alleged insight and grimly proclaim our moving on to a “new normal,” but the psalmist would condemn this as cynicism masquerading as wisdom.

The psalmist invites us to lament, then to gladly remember, and then moves on to confidently state his joyful and defiant hope: *Why are you downcast, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.* He had full confidence in God for his glad return. McArthur had no doubt when he proclaimed “I shall return,” and we should be no different!

“Are we there yet?” No, we are not yet there, and the time frame is still not clear, but let our faith be loud, clear and defiant. *“I shall again praise him, my help and my God.”*

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

Grant, O God, that amidst all the discouragements, difficulties and dangers, distress and darkness of this mortal life, I may depend upon thy mercy, and on this build my hopes, as on a sure foundation. Let thine infinite mercy in Christ Jesus deliver me from despair, both now and at the hour of death.

—Thomas Wilson, 1663-1755