

A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered Down

Friday, January 8, 2021

To Heal Our Land

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

— 2 Chronicles 7:14. Solomon at the Temple dedication

Our land is in need of healing.

This past year had been a painful one and turning the calendar page has made little difference. Together we stand, sickened and saddened by the rioting within the very halls of our Capitol. This has been shocking, but then again it feels like the next natural step on a well-established errant path. We continue to harvest the fruits of national tensions and resentments that only seem to spiral out of control. We go from one contested election (“The Russians rigged it”) to another (“The mail-in ballots were fraudulent”). We go from anarchy zones in our cities, the attempted arsons of federal buildings, and calls to defund police forces, to rampages in our national halls of government. All this bad feeling has been additionally fueled by COVID fears and endless months of social isolation. There is a pandemic of fear and bitterness in our nation, and what shall we do?

Over this long year I have frequently thought of that often-quoted passage, 2 Chronicles 7:14. This command to pray for national restoration has been so commonly quoted over the recent decades that you may even roll your eyes at hearing it mentioned yet again. It may well be an over-quoted verse, but I mention it again, because it is also an under-studied and insufficiently obeyed command! These words of Solomon spoken in his prayer at the dedication of the Temple instructed God’s people as to their right course of action in the midst of national plague or other crisis. More than just a pleasant verse to recite and to hear, it is sound advice which demands our attention if we are to break the present death spiral in which we find ourselves.

The command to God’s people is three-fold. **First, we are to gather as God’s people.** *If my people, who are called by my name,* it begins. We are quick to presume our place and privilege as God’s people, but I believe that God is calling us to more than presumption. Shall we gather, stand, and freely and clearly claim that we are followers of Jesus Christ? Ours is a day when religion “is a very personal thing,” and our attendance at church, let alone our commitment to that family, is taken very casually. Yes, the virus has dampened our ability to gather fully as we would like, but do our hearts cry out with a bold longing for each other and for our Lord? Shall we gather as God’s people to plead His mercy and to pray for the rescue of this land?

Second, we are to *humble ourselves*. We do not think of ourselves as arrogant people, yet there is a pride which poisons our nation, and God's people are not immune to this toxin. When faced with the ills and threats to our nation we are all quick to tout our preferred political plan. We trust in experts. We praise science. All off these items have their important place, and each is a gift from God. Where we get into trouble – big trouble – is when we see each of these items as an end in itself, as the be-all-to-end-all. God slips out of the picture rather quickly and human pride soon takes over, compelling us to push and promote our preferred plan of action as if the world depended upon it.

Politics causes violence and destruction when the participants see politics as their only true hope and salvation. Our salvation is not in Harrisburg or Washington, D.C. Christ alone is our salvation and we need to get into the habit of saying that more loudly, clearly and regularly. Our nation needs to know Jesus. Can we humble ourselves, putting aside claims to our own skill and wisdom, and simply plead before God for mercy and deliverance, or has such humility become passe?

And finally, we need to *pray*. We need to take time before God to plea for wholeness and healing, in our own lives, in our community and in our nation. Politics is not an unimportant pursuit, but it is not the answer. May God's people, starting with me, stand up and be identified as Christ's followers. May we gather, physically when able and always in the Spirit, and humbly plead God's mercy upon this sin sick land. Having so prepared our spirits we shall then be empowered to turn from pride, fear and bitterness and toward the way of life. Let us pray!

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, to forget whom is to stumble and fall, to remember whom is to rise again: we pray thee to draw the people of this country to thyself. Prosper all efforts to make known to them thy truth, that many may learn their need of thee and thy love for them; so that thy Church and kingdom may be established among us to the glory of thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. —Randall T. Davidson, 1848-1930