

Words for an Emerging Church

Wednesday, August 11, 2021

I Smell a Lion

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of suffering. —1 Peter 5:8-9

I think I smell a lion, and at times it seems that a muffled growl or roar can be heard. This lion is seldom seen, but trust me, he is there!

Peter's first epistle draws toward its close with numerous words of wisdom and warning. In his warnings against the prevalent evils of this world he reminds us that wickedness seldom faces us squarely and presents a calling card. Evil is like a prowling beast. He sneaks up on us, waiting for the opportune moment when we are inattentive and unaware. The wise believer, by remaining aware and learning the enemy's ways, knows how to keep him or herself out of a lot of trouble. Not all trouble can be side-stepped, but much of it can, so let us be wise!

In these days I am coming to more deeply appreciate the lion's cunning. Though he may delight in a full assault on an unsuspecting and unprepared victim, there are other and more subtle ways by which harm is done. I recently was told by one of our team that they were sensing a renewed though vague sense of heaviness, gloom, worry and fear. This dear saint smelled a lion! Indeed, they smelled *the* lion, and they were wise enough to get a step ahead of the prowler's plan. What this person was experiencing was not an immediate and lethal threat, but it was an attack just the same, for left unchecked these toxins of fear and unease can do immeasurable damage.

This latest sense of anxiety is COVID related—surprise, surprise—and has a real subtlety to it. At its heart is fear, and how shall we address it? Fear is an inevitable by-product of news from a troubled world and reports of a resurgent germ. But what begins as a reasonable sense of caution can grow into real fear when a twenty-four-hour news cycle, which is always glad to broadcast attention-getting fear, sustains an ongoing drumbeat of panic.

Then come the experts and political leaders who are quick to exploit these fears to elicit their desired behaviors from the public. Which voices shall we trust? It doesn't take long before we are living among a pervasive sense of unease. Joy is sapped from our daily lives, energy diminishes, sleep does not come as easily, and the spirit is harmed. But we know the drill. We have been down this path before, but this trap can

still catch us off guard. Sort out the real story behind all the sensational headlines, assess the real dangers at hand and toss out the unwarranted fears, live appropriately and leave it all in the Lord's hands. Then get on with life! Peter counsels us to study the enemy and to make a plan, and while this may sound complicated, it is not rocket science.

The worst of this pandemic is over here in the United States, but there are still battles to be fought, in the world of germs and especially in the realm of the spirit. The lion keeps scheming, prowling, and growling. He is there—trust me on this one—but outright sightings are rare, and we are more likely to pick up subtle smells and sounds. As Peter tells us, let us *be alert and self-controlled*, and then let us get back to the joyful life!

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

O Lord God, in whom we live and move and have our being, open our eyes that we may behold thy fatherly presence ever with us. Draw our hearts to thee with the power of thy love. Teach us to be anxious for nothing, and when we have done what thou givest us to do, help us, O God our Savior, to leave the issue to thy wisdom. Take from us all doubt and mistrust. Lift our hearts up to thee in heaven, and make us to know that all things are possible to us through thy Son, our Redeemer. —Brooke Foss Westcott, 1825-1901