

Advent Midweek 2 – 2024

The Incarnation and its Divine Ripples ~ Hope or Despair

Romans 8:18-30

Luke 1:26-38

This is a remarkable statement: “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Romans 8:18). That statement is full of hope. That statement doesn’t whitewash difficulty or pretend that being a Christian exempts us from pain or loss or distress – some of it being rather severe. What that statement does is make a comparison. It’s an Easter comparison, a resurrection comparison, and an allusion to heaven. How many of you have a hope for heaven? Where do you suppose that hope comes from?

God’s glory was manifest from time to time in the OT. It was an overwhelming experience for those who were subject to it, for those who witnessed the theophany. In this NT era God’s glory is present but it is hidden, veiled. God has deliberately chosen to reveal Himself in ways that sinful man would not expect. Oftentimes, and this bit provides insight into God’s M.O., God chooses the exact opposite of what sinful man would expect to reveal Himself. The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is the central example. Jesus, in a somber display of trepidation regarding His approaching death, said this: “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name” (John 12:27-28). What is Jesus saying? Father, crucify your Son. In this God’s glory is manifest for all to see. Divine sacrifice, divine love, divine mercy, divine tenderness, divine righteousness, and divine power are all revealed as Jesus suffers for humanity – bearing our sin, suffering our punishment, dying our corporate death. That is how God revealed His glory. That is the apex of God’s revelation. Only the eyes of faith apprehend it. Never forget that.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. It’s a statement of hope. “For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience” (Romans 8:24-25). More than most, I visit hospitals, rehab facilities, places where people are going through difficulties. Presently, we have three saints of Christ the King in such places – Fred Nowak, Russ Bailey, and Kathleen Neebe. Fred is in Redlands Community Hospital, Russ is in San Geronimo Memorial Hospital, and Kathleen is in Arrowhead Springs Healthcare Center. People of hope are in all three facilities. Servants of hope are in all three facilities. The Light of Christ brings hope in places that may be rife with despair. Hope is in the faces of people who know the substance of Jesus’ words. He said: “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Those are resurrection words. Jesus has people in these medical facilities. Hope is the resource which animates a spirit of trust, a spirit that knows that we can endure because whatever our predicament is it is going to be overwhelmed, avalanched by the splendor of God’s glory.

Despair is an enemy. The definition for despair is succinct: “The complete loss or absence of hope.” Despair is an emotional darkness, a cruel and miserable cloak over the heart that allows no light, no sunrise, no expectation of improvement. Despair is a spiritual tyrant. Despair is an absolute. Despair is a unique pain, an unwelcome pain. Consider the woman with the flow of

blood. For twelve years she suffered this unrelenting malady, a malady that distanced her from her people, from the worship life of Israel. Did she think herself cursed by God? Perhaps she did, at dark moments. She carried this burden. At the end of it, who did she find? Who was revealed to her? What was her impulse? It was hope, wasn't it? "...She said to herself, 'If I only touch his garment, I will be made well'" (Matthew 9:21). Glory was revealed to her. She saw the Incarnate Savior, the King of Creation, and He made her well. That woman's hope was realized. How easily did she bear other burdens as her life progressed? How patient was she as old age took some of her vigor? How ravenously did she hunger for Jesus' teaching going forward, knowing that He was the source of her hope, a well-placed vessel of her trust, her faith? What would be her impact on the residents of Arrowhead Springs Healthcare Center?

You should go. I mean that sincerely. You should walk the halls of Arrowhead Springs Healthcare Center. There you will see people in distress. Weak people, troubled people, no shortage of maladies at Arrowhead Springs Healthcare Center. And there are likely some nurses who behave in a perfunctory fashion, punching a clock, going through the medical motions. But there are servants of hope there. I see them. Christ has people in places you don't expect. Hope is born of Christ and His manger, Christ and His cross, Christ and His empty tomb. The heart that has hope is a blessing to those who encounter it, especially when man is under duress. Israel was under duress. Long had they waited for the Messiah. God's word had grown silent. No prophet spoke in Israel for 400 years. And the angel came to Mary. "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you" (Luke 1:28). Hope shone all around the Virgin. Gabriel brought good tidings, brought the message of hope to all Israel. "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will no end" (Luke 2:31-33).

God built man to have hope because God intended to fill that space in man's heart with His Son. A man with a Christ-centered hope is a powerful thing in this fallen world. There will be no shortage of difficulty. Despair is like a gaunt ghost with sunken eyes and misshapen mouth who wants to inject his diseased misery on those who suffer. The man with hope is a defender, a protector, a lively spirit who casts aside this dark imposter and brings Christ and His manger to the needy. Christ and His manger; who expected God to reveal Himself in a manger? A no-account young lass from Nazareth gives birth to a son in Bethlehem and lays him in a manger. Shepherds are told to go and see. Hope rising in their hearts, they run to the city of David to see this thing. And see they did. But it was a boy, like any other, that they saw. Yet they knew – He is more, so much more, so incredibly much more. By His Word, God had opened the eyes of their hearts to see more.

"If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31) That is a statement of hope. "He who did not spare own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32). That is a statement of hope. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Hope is anchored in God becoming man. You are a people of hope. You bring hope to Fred Nowak, Russ Bailey, Kathleen Neebe, and the Belli women. Don't underestimate it. Don't doubt its veracity, its substance and its impact. "May the God of

hope fill you with all joy in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope” (Romans 15:13).