

4 March 2018

Edna & Port Lavaca

Keep Me From Stupid Sins

Psalm 19: 7 & 8 The revelation of God is whole and pulls our lives together. The signposts of God are clear and point out the right road. The life-maps of God are right, showing the way to joy. The directions of God are plain and easy on the eyes.

In this time of Lent, we are told to contemplate our short-comings, think about the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross and to give up something that we value in order to put us in the proper penitential frame of mind. All of this, of course, in preparation for the glories of Easter. But there is another part to Lent – a charge to seek the wholeness of life. Psalm 19 leads that charge. Peterson, in his translation, does a marvelous job of reminding us that David, that bad boy apple of God's Old Testament eye, had some very important things to say to us about creating a God-centered existence for ourselves.

David starts off by reminding us that the best place to experience God is in nature. "God's glory is on tour in the skies." Hello astronomy. Followed by a bow to geology. "God-craft on exhibit across the horizon." We are all to spend our time in study – "Madame Day holds classes every morning. Professor Night lectures each evening." Peter reminds us that these are not ordinary classes led by divines of one sort or another, that Madame Day and Professor Nights' "words aren't heard, their voices aren't recorded. But their silence fills the earth: unspoken truth is spoken everywhere." And it is up to us, or to science, if you will, to simply find those truths. "That's how God's Word vaults across the skies from sunrise to sunset, Melting ice, scorching deserts, warming hearts to faith."

Close to three thousand years ago and David is telling us that science, is one of God's favorite languages and that far from separating God from humankind, an examination of nature lets us see God's Word vaulting across the skies, "warming hearts to faith." David continues by telling us that there are four gifts from God that will allow us to live a God-centered existence.

"The revelation of God is whole and pulls our lives together." This is the first gift. Our grasp of God is not piecemeal – God reveals herself to us completely – if we cannot see Her, we have closed our eyes. Once we have seen, in a highly personal fashion, we can translate the wholeness of God into our own feelings, our own existence. We are not breadwinners, parents, members of this and that – we are whole people. We bring our whole selves to all of our diverse roles. Every role we play is enhanced by the relationships that make up the whole. Schizophrenia is not a necessary part of modern life.

The second gift: "The signposts of God are clear and point out the right road." A few years ago, during lunch with a recently retired oil executive from Houston, some bad production platform decisions came up for discussion and I said maybe the managers needed an ethics workshop. The executive replied, "the problem is not that they don't know what is the right behavior, the problem is the lack of will to do it." He was right. God's signposts are clear. Our greed may obscure them – vandals may try painting over them, but we really know what the right road is. What we need is the will to travel the road. We also must reward our children, our colleagues, and all others who are following the sign posts of God and remind them of their duty to follow those sign posts when they do not. The sign posts are indeed clear. It does not require a workshop to read them. It does require an act of will to walk that road.

Which brings us to the third gift: “The life-maps of God are right, showing the way to joy.” Now, we know that the dog of predestination chases the tail of free will, and most of us do sense a pattern to our lives. These “life-maps of God,” will plot our travels through disappointments, physical disabilities, pain, even parenting teenagers, but the journey will also show us the way to joy. It is not just joy at the end of the journey, but joy all during that life-journey. The joy that comes from observing God’s creations. The joy that is born of little satisfactions. The joy that comes with accomplishments, large and small. It is a joy that comes from embracing the “rightness” of God’s life-map. Personal excursions away from the life-map come at a price. And it is not just the run of the mill sins that make up those excursions, it may well be too much time at work, too great a fixation on a sport or hobby or too great a personal indulgence of any kind. The price is always a lessening of the joy of living. So, if you don’t have enough joy in your life, you need to not only stop and smell the roses, you need to use God’s life-map to find the roses.

Finding those roses is made easier still because of God’s fourth gift: “The directions of God are plain and easy on the eyes.” Ah, a large screen Global Positioning System made godly! The perfect GPS! This is the second time Psalmist David has stressed that God’s signs are clear. For a person who spent most of his life ignoring God’s signs one can understand why David was preoccupied with seeing signs plainly. Perhaps he wrote this psalm near the end of his woman chasing, man killing career as a ruler. Let us hope that David in later life found God’s signs “easy on the eyes.” For they really are: They possess an intrinsic beauty – the beauty that comes from establishing a followership and fellowship with Jesus, the Christ. And, isn’t that what the Christian life-journey is all about?

Four wonderful gifts: Revelation, signposts, life-maps and directions. That is surely enough, but David says: “There’s more: God’s Word warns us of danger and directs us to hidden treasure. Otherwise how will we find our way? Or know when we play the fool? Clean the slate, God, so we can start the day fresh! Keep me from stupid sins, from thinking I can take over your work: Then I can start this day sun-washed, scrubbed clean of the grime of sin.” Amen.