

1 Corinthians 7:29-31 Higher Thoughts
Psalm 62
January 21, 2024

When I think of the Bible, I often think in terms of the many lines and phrases that it gives in its poetry and prose, that can be remembered and can be a source of solace, and inspiration, and wisdom, and guidance. For instance from the 55th chapter of Isaiah;

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,”
declares the Lord.

9 “As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Or from Paul in his letter to the Philippians;

“Rejoice in the Lord, always, I will say it again,
rejoice,” which is a good way to begin the day. Along with making the bed, although some, I am sure, may disagree, it can help a person to start the day out on a positive note, maybe even a sense of excitement about the day.

Lately, a positive sentiment seems a little like something associated with Don Quixote and windmills in the reality of the news we hear each day, and sometimes our own daily news. I don't mean all the things people argue about, but just the usual recital; poverty, war, disease, strife, insecurity. It has always

been true that people, including the people of faith, have had to rejoice in the face of these realities.

Whatever the truth is regarding all the things people argue about, it must be accepted that after all these years, the good things that people have accomplished; democracy, medical science, communications and other kinds of advanced technology, HVAC, have not solved these fundamental problems.

So it is interesting to read this 1 Corinthians text, written nearly two thousand years ago, before the population explosion, all the changes, and the overwhelming sets of choices and solutions and problems with which modern life confronts us. Paul, way back then, saw the world as he knew it, *passing away*. Many people in our times see it that way too, some speak as if ours is the first generation to have thought about it in this way.

In view of his understanding of the world as “going away,” Paul advises living one's life as if this world isn't *trustworthy*, not worthy our our heart's desire. It turns out that no matter what the truth is about the world's past, about its present, and its future, Paul is giving sound advice.

“From now on those who have wives should live as if they do not; 30 those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep;”

The 62nd Psalm chimes in as well. It is a psalm divided between two themes, they alternate throughout the psalm; the trustworthiness of God, and the untrustworthiness of the world and its people. Let me put it together in a different way, with themes removed from their alternating rhythm, and the verses of each given together:

- Truly my soul finds rest in God;
my salvation comes from him.
- 2 Truly he is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.
- 5 Yes, my soul, find rest in God;
my hope comes from him.
- 6 Truly he is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will not be shaken.
- 7 My salvation and my honor depend on God;
he is my mighty rock, my refuge.
- 8 Trust in him at all times, you people;
pour out your hearts to him,
for God is our refuge.

And what is contrasted is references to this world, to the habit of trusting in the world of human beings:

- 3 How long will you assault me?
Would all of you throw me down—
this leaning wall, this tottering fence?
- 4 Surely they intend to topple me
from my lofty place;
they take delight in lies.
- With their mouths they bless,
but in their hearts they curse.

- 9 Surely the lowborn are but a breath,
the highborn are but a lie.
If weighed on a balance, they are nothing;
together they are only a breath.
- 10 Do not trust in extortion
or put vain hope in stolen goods;
though your riches increase,
do not set your heart on them.

Thus are the two visions of how one might approach life.

But there is more, for the psalm makes a judgment that must be heard. It is a confirmation of a discovery, that part of what the life of faith is about *is* the struggle between these two ideas; dependence on self and other people, and full dependence on God. Frankly, there are many situations in life in which people do not experience God's decisive presence. Rather, people undergo trauma up to and including death for all the reasons that are common, not to mention the tasks required of us each day.

That is why, in the faith we share, it is also held that the faithful are dependent upon God even in *tragedy and death*, that all eternity as well as each day, is in God's hands.

- 11 One thing God has spoken,
two things I have heard:
“That you, O God, are strong,

12 and that you, Lord, are loving”;
and, “You reward everyone
according to what they have done.”

The reason that in this leaning wall and tottering fence of a world, placing trust in people is a disappointment, is because there are no people who can claim power over eternity, that are strong enough, and loving enough. What is the conclusion?

Live this life, that is what Paul says. Endure hardship as discipline (that is the way the Letter to the Hebrews puts it). Cherish the good and wondrous experiences of life and be thankful, but do not set your hearts on them. “Have,” as the theologian Paul Tillich put it, “as having not.” That will tease your brain a little. But it is a one sentence homily on the Corinthian text.

There are many, I suppose, who just don’t have time for these considerations. “Is there a God? They have too many things to do to even think of it. Is there a moral center, that is more than our own opinions and thoughts, that impresses itself upon us from without? Some don’t think too much about it as they pursue their dreams, some can be cavalier as they stumble their way through. It is easy to become overly attached to the things of this world.

Often it is tragedy and trauma itself that drives people to these questions and considerations. It was that way for those who wrote the psalms, and the other books in the Old Testament. It is a great treasure that they

have given us, that God has given through them, to help us.

They wrote:

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want . . .
Love the Lord with all your heart and soul and strength
Love your neighbor as yourself
Give thanks to the Lord, for God is good, God’s
steadfast love endures forever
Put your hope in the Lord, for those who wait rise up
on wings like eagles . . .
Do not put your trust in princes (or dare I say,
presidents and prime ministers)
Trust the Lord with all your heart . . .
Seek God and live

They offer us a realistic understanding of life, an honest assessment of its possibilities and our potential, an assuring hope, that when we order our lives around faith in God as revealed in Jesus Christ, there is no situation that threatens us or can touch the life given to us.

Don’t you think it is worth the time we spend thinking about higher thoughts? Is it not worth the time and energy, the offerings we bring and the service we give, the fellowship we share, the praises we sing?

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