

“A Bigger Perspective”

Isaiah 40:21-31

I have been familiar with this verse in Isaiah since I was a young man of barely twenty years old. It was prominent in a song that became a devotional for me, and it was also featured in one of my favorite films, “Chariots of Fire” winner of “Best Film” at Academy Awards for 1981. The film is about the track team from the U.K. competing in the 1924 Olympics. It is focused on two sprinters, Harold Abrams and Eric Lytle from Scotland. Today’s passage is being read by Eric Lytle who was a devout Presbyterian. While his voice is reading from Isaiah, on screen is a montage of scenes in slow motion where runners are striving to win, running through wet and muddy conditions. It is a moving scene that captures the spirit of Isaiah’s text.

One of the overarching themes of divine scripture is for the reader to see a bigger picture of life and reality. In all of the early stories in Genesis and Exodus, the hero of the stories, whether it is Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Caleb, each have to come to the place where they recognize the presence and power of God in their life, before they can fulfill the destiny of their life. This theme continues through the stories of the Kings, the judges, and the prophets, whose message is echoed to the people of his generation by Isaiah, when he pleads with them, *“Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told to you from the beginning? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in; who brings princes to naught, and makes rulers of the earth as nothing...”*

The message of Isaiah and all of scripture is this, “those who learn how to draw strength, favor, wisdom, and belonging from God, live a different life than those who feel no connection or relationship with the center of creation. The message of scripture is this: God can be known and loved, at any age, and those who know God and love God, pursue different things than those who neither know or love God.

For me, I believe this is applicable regardless of whether you are religious or not, or what religion you are. If you are a person who has gained the perspective that, “I am not in the center here; it is not about me and mine. There is a community of which I am a part, a broad human family, an infinite universe, and my life is not about living for myself, or taking for myself the abundance all around me. My life is about connecting and participating in the life and community around me. God is in all and over all, and to the degree that I connect and contribute to the world around me, of which I share, my life becomes what it is supposed to become. Life becomes full as each of us connect to the One who gives life to all.

I think this is why the Shema of the Jewish tradition, “Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, mind, and soul; and love your neighbor as yourself” is the foundation for the life and teaching of our own Icon, Jesus of Nazareth. Or other teachings such as, “It is more blessed to give, than it is to receive” It is why he was able to lay his life down for the whole world, and discover eternal life by doing so.

It seems to be much more common to feel alone and isolated. It seems that we are more inclined to feel like we have to make our place in this world, rather than to recognize or receive our place. In the movie, “Chariot’s of Fire,” these two

different perspectives are modeled by the two main characters. Harold Abrams is a young Jewish man in a staunchly Christian culture. From early in his life, he has had to fight for everything. In his own words, “They, (meaning the dominant Christian culture,) will allow him to the water, but not let him drink.” So he runs, to defeat his opponents, to prove a point, that a Jew is just as good and blessed as a Christian.” The gold medal he seeks is for himself, and all others like him, who are the outsiders looking in. Eric Lytle runs for a different reason. In his own words spoken to his sister who prefers him to give up running and continue the missionary work in China started by their father, a Presbyterian minister and missionary, “When I run, I feel God’s pleasure.” The movie depicts God’s pleasure as the power and source of his dominant speed. In the film, Eric Lytle personifies the words of Isaiah, “...*but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.*”

Scripture is filled with characters that begin their journey feeling alone and against the world around them, scrapping and conniving to make their place, but along the way, they discover the grace and presence of God, and learn of God’s pleasure in them and for them. We are blessed when we discover the favor and strength of God in our life. We are blessed when we exchange our fears of being denied our place for the assurance that our place has already been designed and delivered to us. We are created into this world for God’s pleasure and to do God’s pleasure. This is the message of scripture. Whether we are a Jew or a Christian, a muslim or a pagan, religious or irreligious, Episcopalian or Pentecostal, a lily of the field, a sparrow in the air, or a king upon the thrown, we are all to find our moving and our breathing in the life that is all life, in the mystery we call God.

We Christians have a powerful gospel that helps us to move from the perspective that we are alone and isolated in this world, and whatever we have we must work and toil for it -- to the perspective that God is with us and we are not alone. The life and teachings of Jesus show us the way from self-centeredness to Christ-centeredness, a life that is begotten of God, dearly loved and intimately known. Such a life naturally prays in as many ways and means afforded by every movement and thought. Such a life knows that they are a prayer, they are breathed into this world to love, to heal, to build, to make peace, to bring joy, and that everything they do and say, is to be a sacrament of God, the invisible grace becoming a visible manifestation of that grace. There is a huge difference between doing something for the sake and pleasure and advancement of self, and doing something because you feel God's pleasure. And we know God's pleasure because we have discovered our place in God . This was the power of Jesus, in his own words, he and the father were one and he prayed that all who believed and followed him, would be made one together with him. Jesus invites us to move from the place of feeling separated from God, to the place of realizing that we are children of God, and therefore family to all creation.

I was only twenty years old when I became familiar with this verse from scripture. My teenage years had seen its share of trauma and broken family. I did not have a clue as to what I would do or who I would be as an adult. But I did have this verse, and it spoke to me in the depths where it became a truth to me. *Even the young men stumble and fall but those who wait, and who trust upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. “* And I have always found these words, to be true. Amen