

Facing Life's Last High Hurdles, "Why Should Not Old Men be Mad?"

Most of us, if we live long enough, will likely be faced with some of the failures, the poet Yeats wrote about in the poem bearing the title quoted above. Truly, the golden years of retirement, so hyped by optimists and insurance salesmen, may not be the bed of roses promised.

Thankfully, I've been blessed with over twenty years of relatively blissful retirement. But now, into the "end game," the world has grown much darker than before. Here are a few pitfalls that could smudge your happily ever after.

First, comes body breakdown. The vehicle I retired in has undergone a number of challenges to its resale value. My hearing, once as acute as a mousing cat's, has, thanks to years of abuse, become so impaired that I have to pretend I'm hearing when I'm not. I smile, I nod, I agree and walk away stumped, even with my hearing aids amped up to the max.

Last Sunday's sermon was so distorted by echoes, background noise and reedy voices that I came away with maybe 10% of the message. And without closed captions the same holds true of many of the voices I "hear" on TV. The high, clear voices of sopranos and tenors I can hear fairly well, but any of the reedy, guttural, or timbre rich sounds I used to like are too fuzzy to understand.

If you still have your hearing, guard it like a treasure. It's no fun being out of the conversation, especially when banter and repartee used to be one's forte. And it's even less fun when most of the singers seem to be out of tune. Now I'm down to Keely Smith, Eva Cassidy, Doris Day, and Al Hibbler. Oh yes, and Louis Armstrong still 'zounds' like himself.

Now I judge music by its lyrics. And with most pop music, there's no "there" there. Their "lyrics" truly "suck." Duke Ellington and Hoagie Carmichael would roll over in their graves listening to the babel the hip-hoppers and pseudo

boppers are shoveling out. Their speech is sadly an assault on the English language.

Shakespeare foreshadowed this illiteracy in the speeches of Caliban and Mad Tom. Caliban was the deformed slave in “The Tempest,” obsessed with raping Miranda, Prospero’s innocent daughter, and Mad Tom is the homeless guy in “King Lear” who “eats cow dung for sallets, swallows the old rat, and drinks the green mantel from the standing pool.”

Not just hearing, but other bodily functions may also become impaired.

At 70 I could still sink hook shots from 30 ft. out. Now I’ve got to be inside the free throw line to reach the basket. My balance also has begun to suffer so I need support to cross anything rough or slippery. And, dare I speak of bowel movements? Well, why not? If I hadn’t learned from my 1st proctologist, Dr. Tony Rillo, how to deal with prolapsed rectal issues, every trip to the bathroom would still be an adventure. His advice? “If they pooch out, gently push ‘em back up.” Drink more water and eat more fiber. As Yeats put it, “Bodily decrepitude is wisdom./ Young, we loved each other/ And were ignorant.”

Well, I could harp on senior medical problems unto ad nauseam, but the real pain comes when an old man hears that loved ones are afflicted or have succumbed to fallen humanity’s death sentence. That’s where the one medicine that always works comes in, and that’s the one prescribed by the “great physician” himself, Jesus. And even that won’t work without faith to believe the truth, that “by His stripes we are healed.” (Is. 53:5)

Consider “the woman with the issue of blood,” who said, “If I can but touch the hem of His garment, I will be healed.” She did. And in that huge crowd pressing in on Jesus, she was the only one whose touch he perceived: “Who touched me? .. Woman, thy faith hath healed thee.” Clearly, faith is an indispensable requirement for making God’s “great and precious promises”(II

Peter:1), work for us. And though we've all been given "the" measure of faith, few ever learn to bring it to bear, and that's because hope, faith's catalyst, is so miss-understood. "Hope in the Hebrew means "confident expectation of of good," not some fragile dying bird with crippled wings. When hope is strong, faith has something to grasp and give "substance" to.(See Heb. 11:1)

Now, more then ever, these troubled times demand that we get to know the "defiant things of the Spirit," faith, hope and love," that will lead us on to "victory in Jesus."

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