

Love: Still our Last, Best Hope

“Roaming in thought over the Universe/ I saw the little that is/ *Good* steadily hastening toward immortality./ And the vast all that is call’d Evil I saw hastening to merge/ itself and become lost and dead.” - Walt Whitman.

Certainly, Whitman's life during the time of Lincoln and The Civil War, had daunting problems, but history has shown us that even “the worst of times” were survived, and somehow the dream of our founders of a blessed and unified America was preserved.

Repeatedly we’ve faced storms: the depression, Hitler, Stalin’s communism, where the cold war gave us decades of survival via “mutually assured destruction,” but finally, thanks to the prayers of believers, the iron curtain came down and the American theater opened to another show.

But today’s challenges seem truly insoluble; a malaise of uncertainty plagues the nation. The distinction between good and evil seems blurred as never before, as factions face off spouting declarations of mutually assured mistrust and hatred. Civil attempts at resolving our differences seem futile, as the latest crises --the debt ceiling, the border, drugs, shootings, separates right from left, liberals from conservatives, the good guys from the bad guys.

The product of all this division is fear, and according to the scriptures the only thing powerful enough to defeat fear is love *understood* by the church, and more specifically, each individual member of “the body of Christ”--you and me. “Jesus loves even me,” says the old hymn. And “nothing can separate us from the love of God,” says Paul in Romans 8.

Consider the deeper implications of these lines from chapter 2 of Solomon’s “Song of Songs,” “My beloved spake and said unto me, ‘Rise up my love, my fair

one and come away, for lo, the winter is passed, the rain is over and done, the flowers appear on the earth, and “the time for the singing of birds has come, and the sound of the turtle is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth her green figs and the vines with tender grapes give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one and come away.”

Singapore’s Pastor Joseph Prince claims that these lines refer to the invitation true Christians will hear when God “raptures” the church. (I Thes. 4: 16, 17.) He sees much hope for us in the symbolism of that matchless poem, best rendered by the King James translation: The *winter* which is passed stands for whatever evil or fearful thing we face: addictions, poverty, homelessness, abandonment, tyrants and their wars. Each is a “winter of discontent,” and “The rain, it raineth every day,” sings the fool in “*King Lear*,” a tragedy in which hope never comes to the rescue.

Solomon's flowers are symbols of new potential, as each flower contains the seeds of future abundance. The cooing of the turtle doves suggests undying love and peace, and other birds lifting their throats in song remind us we have much to be joyous about.

Of special significance is the fig tree, putting forth its tender green figs -- symbols of provision for a fruitful future. That reminds us of Jesus’ cursing the fruitless fig tree in Mark 11. He saw in it a symbol of phony righteousness of the kind celebrated by the pharisees. When a fig tree has leaves, it should have figs. The one Jesus curses has none.

This brings to mind Adam and Eve’s clothing themselves with fig leaves, which they sew together after their fall. This display of self-consciousness displeased God: “Who told you you were naked?” After that the intimate relationship they once shared, “walking and talking in the cool of the day,” would be lost, replaced

by the guilt that would follow the human race unhappily ever after. Satan would see to that.

The fig tree, of course, is the traditional symbol of Israel at peace, as it was in the time of Solomon: “And Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree from Dan even to Beersheba in the days of Solomon.” (I Kings 5:25.)

Revisiting “Song of Songs” was truly an illuminating experience, especially as I avoided the traditional reading of that work by many academics as an exercise in pure sensuality so cherished by such as those who “come and go/ Talking of Michelangelo.” I was astonished at the sheer beauty of that work, made even more beautiful by the content of its message: we are God’s “beloved,” His “workmanship” His *poema* in progress. Understand that, and all the love that goes with it, and any thoughts of depression, hopelessness or suicide vanish like a mirage on the desert’s dusty face. God loves us; we can count on it.

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