

ON REACHING THE POINT OF NO RETURN

Luke 9:62, Philippians 3:14

A new beatitude I give unto you. If you have ears to hear, hear it. It goeth like this: "Blessed is he who hath reached the point of no return and knoweth it--for in with acceptance lieth freedom." On the surface, this beatitude soundeth rather sad and everyone knoweth that beatitudes are supposed to be attitudes that make you glad. And yet I say unto you, there is a key for happiness here. Let me explain:

1.) First of all, you really should know in this life when you have reached the point of no return. It is sad not to know. It is pathetic to keep kidding yourself. There comes a time when you might as well admit to what you are, for, after all you are it. Old Samuel Taylor Coleridge could pretend about growing old:

"Life is but thought: so think I will that youth and I are house-mates still."

But as soon as he got up out of his rocking chair and felt his joints creak, or as he crossed the room, he had to give up this absurd idea: "This body" he had to admit, "does me grievous wrong. He finally faces up to it: Only in youth did it "flash along".

Now it's certainly all right to be as active and as attractive as one's age and health permit. It is, I do think, one's religious duty to put the old best foot forward, but do not forget that in spite of all the dieting and dyeing, dressing and jogging you can do, you will always be and look precisely as old as you are. You can be a most winsome 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90 year old, but you won't fool anyone, certainly not your grandchildren. You see the "New Yorker" cartoon of the obviously middle-aged woman, pointing her finger at her face in the mirror, and saying to herself in disbelief: "You? have a child in college?" So it's well to know when face and figure have reached the point of no return to youth. Naturally, everyone at times has wondered with Victor Hugo in his ("Paroled") from whence came the sermon topic; "Where, then, have fled my vanished years?" but don't make a production out of it. They've fled where everyone else's have fled. So what? Cut the melodrama. Recall a wealthy old lady (a Durham lady long dead) weeping every evening in front of her own portrait in the dining room, actually believing she could have been a great opera star, except that 50 years before her mama and papa had forbid her going on the stage. Nonsense! She never could sing. She couldn't even carry a tune in one of her (...)
teacups. And you? --you? wish now you had been a business man instead of a professor? A physicist instead of a pharmacist? A professional woman instead of a house-wife? A psychiatrist instead of a parson? Tall instead of short? Handsome instead of intelligent?

*Paroled (I think?)
S. sure sure
S. sure*

finest

Bariton
A Zin Buddhist instead of a Presbyterian? A Ph.D. instead of just plain rich? A bon vivant instead of a (...)? Or is it a different race you wish you belonged to? Or born to a different place? Or been with a different spouse? (...) Stop the world because you want to get off? Is that it? Unfortunately you cannot. You've made decisions--decisions through the years and they're with you forever.

say, stop the...
Greenville sound
Listen: "You be's what you is" as Big Willie on (.....) used to say. You are what you are and where you are and there's only one blessed thing you can do about it: You can take it from there--you and God together. You certainly cannot go home and start all over again--never--wouldn't really want to if you could. You can't anyway. You can only deal with yourself as you now are--not as you might have been "if only"; not as you imagine yourself to be, so (...-...). No, only as you are; *Therefore,* and no amount of weeping, and fasting, and praying will change how you arrived at where you now find yourself. Even God can't change your past--only your future and the way you look at both. Remember T. S. Eliot's *I believe he meant to leave off (and)* (...)? He speaks: Listen, *Looks like Prose*

don't know
But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,

Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter,

I am no prophet--and here's no great matter;

I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker, and I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,

And in short, I was afraid.

.....
No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;

Am an attendant lord, one that will do

To swell a progress, start a scene or two

Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,

Deferential, glad to be of use,

Politic, cautious, and meticulous;

Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;

At times, indeed, almost ridiculous--

Almost, at times, the Fool.

I grow old....I grow old...

You think that's (.....)? ^{despair} No--I think not. That's just wise acceptance. No more foolish weeping, fasting, praying for the impossible. Rather: "wise acceptance"

Now, hear this: there is a difference between "wise acceptance" (which can be a beatitude, a blessing, a happy attitude) and what we usually call "resignation" (which can be most pitiful).

If you say "I am resigned to my life" and mean by that you are defeated, sunk, have lost heart, lost hope, lost faith and awe and laughter--if you mean you feel beaten; if you mean you are willing to accept evil and ugliness and injustice; if you mean you have come to the place where you are willing to stand by while the good are punished, while the wicked go scot-free; if by "being resigned" you mean you are now willing to let virtue be trampled on, and honesty mocked, and beauty fouled, all because you're afraid, because you don't want to become involved, because you won't and don't do anything about it, because you don't care--then--to quote one of Somerset Maugham's characters, (Fred in The narrow corner , Chapter 28) you're in hell already, in misery, no God in that, no blessing in that, no good. You are, speaking biblically, "in one hell of a fix." You have resigned from life--and you can't just up and resign from life. You can't send in your resignation to the world--not and live, not and live any life worth living.

So, I'm not talking about resignation. I'm talking about wise acceptance. That's something else altogether. How can I explain it to you--that it's carrying on in conviction and courage, in holy calm and good cheer from where you really are to where God wants you to be? --believing "all things do work together....."

Do you remember Abigail Crockett? (in Mary Ellen Chase's Silas Crockett)? At 63 about

everything had happened to Abigail that could happen to her. When, as a final blow, her husband died, she did not do a great deal of this “oh little me--poor little me--dear sweet little me--oh the injustice of it all--weep, weep--weepily-weepily--weep, weep, weep.” Not a bit of it. She did not pamper herself with the thought God had singled her out for some special torture. God could have cured him if he’d wanted to. She knew that the only certain thing about life is that it is uncertain. Friends come and go. Kin come and go. Children grow and go. All things come and go. She had the good earth sense to know that time and ceaseless change are identical. She loved her man, but was no less eager and alive that he had died. Not the merry widow--but not the deceased one either. “Once a thing is over,” she said, “and you know it is, you don’t keep on fussing and working yourself up all to no purpose. It’s hanging on to things that hurts you most in this world, not just seeing them go.”

She reminds me of my great Aunt Mary. When Blair died, she said, “The worst thing that could ever happen to me has happened. I’ll never have to fear the worst again.” And she never did. She lived 20 more years of eager life--salty, sassy, running her house, (...), giving her relatives and friends a merry chase. “In wise acceptance” said some sage, “lies freedom.”

Listen to me: you are what you are and you are where you are and that is that. No one can alter that now--not even God. But he can alter the way you look both ways.

As for your mistakes, your sin of yesterdays--there is the forgiveness of God by which you learn. As for your hope of tomorrow, there is the grace of God on which you go. It all depends now on you to take it from there.

Our Lord said, “No man, having once put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God. Luke 9:62

And , after a long and arduous life, Saint Paul said: “Forgetting those things that are behind, I press on toward the goal for the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” Philippians 3:14

Life is always “Forward!”--“Forward march!”--in high faith.

There is only one alternative.