

# Bread for the Journey

[Luke 6:20-31]

K Karpen, Sunday, November 7, 2004

Psalm 42 [Read responsively, leader reading one line and congregation repeating it.]

As a deer longs for flowing streams,  
So my soul longs for you O God.  
My soul thirsts for God,  
for the living God.  
When shall I come and behold  
the face of My God?  
My tears have been my food  
both day and night,  
while people say to me continually,  
"Where is your God?"

These things I remember,  
as I pour out my soul:  
how I went with the throng,  
and led them in procession to  
the house of God,  
with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving and praise! *[repeat]*  
A multitude keeping festival. *[repeat]*  
Why are you cast down, O my soul,  
And why are you disquieted within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise God,  
my help and my God.

...

Deep calls to deep  
at the thunder of your cataracts;  
all your waves and your billows have washed over me.  
All day God commands a spirit of love,  
and all night God's song  
sings inside my soul.

...

I awoke Wednesday morning in a bit of a funk, because my particular candidate for president had not convinced enough other people to vote for him. And God did what God usually does when I find myself wallowing in myself. God began gently tossing songs into my mind. At first, maybe in God's attempt to make fun of my thoughts of taking off for Canada, came "I'll Fly Away."

"One bright morning when my life is o'er, I'll fly away.  
To my home on bright Vancouver's shore, I'll fly away."

It made me laugh. But I don't want to move to Canada. And it didn't chase away the funk. So God tried again, and this one hit home.

"Why should I feel discouraged?  
Why should the shadows come?  
Why should my heart be lonely,  
And long for heaven and home.  
When Jesus is my portion?  
My constant friend is he.  
His eye is on the sparrow,  
And I know he watches me.  
His eye is on the sparrow,  
And I know he watches me.

Let not your heart be troubled,  
His tender word I hear,  
And resting on his goodness,  
I lose my doubts and fears.  
Though by the path he leadeth  
But one step I may see.  
His eye is on the sparrow  
And I know he cares for me.

Whenever I am tempted  
Whenever clouds arise  
When song gives place to sighing  
When hope within me dies.

I draw the closer to him  
From care he sets me free.

His eye is on the sparrow,

And I know he watches me.  
His eye is on the sparrow  
And I know he watches me."

I didn't quite sing because I was happy, and I didn't quite sing because I felt so free. I sang because I got this sense that whatever else didn't make sense--

God was still God.  
God was still God.

I looked outside. Almost miraculously, the sun had come up. People were driving down the street. People were *actually driving* down the street! Life was going to continue.

And all that day I was filled with this sense of expectation that God had something in mind which I'd find out about by and by. And I thought of the words of John Bennett that "God does not will all things, but God wills something out of everything."

And I had the further thought that no matter who had won the election, the task of the church would be the same: To bring the prophetic faith of the Gospel to the public square, without fear, and speak in unambiguous tones about the values embodied in scripture.

- Commitment to the cause of the poor
- Defense of the marginalized & ostracized in society
- A reverence for life—even after birth
- Commitment to the ways of peace, even if those ways are politically unpopular
- Compassion for the foreigner, the stranger at our gates
- That we are loved by God
- God's unconditional love for each one of us—women, men, young, old, black, white, whatever
- Fullness for those who are hungry
- Comfort for those who weep
- Blessings for those who curse us
- Justice for all who are oppressed by smallness, greed, and bigotry

These are the moral values embedded in the Gospel, and I'm not sure I heard much about them from either party. I was surprised by all the wonder and shock and surprise that as many as 22% voted this year out of their moral values. I sure did! All people of faith had better! I want to know what the other 78% based their votes on!!?

We got some work to do. Bud Carroll wrote to me from Hong Kong, reminding me that the Chinese character for crisis also means opportunity. You and I have a huge opportunity to so embody these "moral values" that they will be impossible to ignore.

We have an opportunity as those who speak the language of Christianity and the language of progressive politics to bridge the strange & artificial gulf all our politicians have sought to widen for their own purposes. We have an opportunity to enter into work of healing and reconciliation—or at least conversation, which neither the secular left nor the political right is quite prepared to do.

More than that, you and I have a huge opportunity to reach out in the name of the Gospel and touch one person with compassion and understanding. The way Jesus did. When all is said and done, that's the work of the kingdom. You see, once God had me convinced that the world hadn't ended, one more song came to mind:

"Lord I keep so busy working for the kingdom,  
Keep so busy working for the kingdom,  
Keep so busy working for the kingdom,  
Ain't got time to die.

'Cause when I'm feeding the poor,  
I'm working for the kingdom  
Feeding the poor, I'm working for the kingdom,  
Feeding the poor, I'm working for the kingdom,  
Ain't got time to die!"

We ain't got time to die. One of you wrote to me the day after the election: "Right now I'm in no mood to fret about election results, but I think we have to keep faith, follow the example we have set for ourselves, and keep fighting hard for social justice from our corner of Manhattan. After all, 3 years ago I thought it was literally not possible for us to raise \$3 million to renovate the basement, and look what we have done. If we lose faith now, then we will have real cause for hand wringing and worse."

We all went through a lot this election season, whichever candidate you may have personally favored. We all had causes for joy & despair, but through it all God begs us to get up & get working. And if we touch one person, so be it. Mac Speights, a pastor friend of mine wrote me this tale of what happened to him & his partner Bob on Election Day. He titled it: "How we helped save Vampiria on election day."

"It was a beautiful fall morning on November 2<sup>nd</sup>. After the morning rush, we drove up to the high school to enact our crucial privilege of pulling levers for the lesser-of-two-evil candidates. We each traipsed into the booth, pulled the lever so the skirt flowed around our upper bodies, and did our civic duty.

On the way home, we made a quick decision to drive to the top of cemetery hill because from up there you can see across the sound to Connecticut. Once out of the car, we walked to the pinnacle and took in the view. The marvelous yellows and browns punctuated by vivid reds and oranges made the leafy sight around Huntington Harbor and beyond just BEE-autiful!

Then we noticed the other car. At first we thought it was the usual make-out couple that you find in this exotic location, but at 11:30 am this guess just didn't fit the mold. Eventually, a figure emerged from the vehicle. She was tall and lanky, dressed in black from head to toe, with long dark hair, a ring in her nose and possibly in other parts of her body. She spoke slowly and groggily.

"I don't mean to bother you, but could you help me with my car? I must have left the radio on too long, and the battery seems dead." I moved my car behind hers. But she had parked just close enough to gravestones on each side that it was not possible to make the traditional connection with jumper cables. So we decided to push her car backwards. This, too, was to no avail since she was on a slight incline toward the front of the vehicle and when we 80- and 64-year-olds tried to push it, well, the car resisted enough to discourage our efforts. After all, we didn't want it rolling over us even though we would have been in an appropriate place for immediate burial.

We told Vampira (the name I now give the hapless young woman, since we have decided she must have been so high she had been there since Halloween night, like, two days earlier) we would send help her way. I don't know if she believed it.

My auto repair shop was just down the hill. So we stopped there to let George, the owner, know of her dilemma. I told him if she didn't have the wherewithal to pay for the battery charge, I would pay. He thanked me but said he'd take care of it, no charge. And I suppose he did. That's why I like him.

I wish we could have helped save something more than Vampira on Election Day. Like democracy. Or Western civilization. But one does what one can."

It somehow reminded me of the story of Wangari Maathai, the Kenyan woman who just won the Nobel Peace prize for leading a movement that began with the simple act of planting a tree and then another tree. And as she planted trees, she got other

women to plant a tree, too, and then another tree. She was beaten unconscious, put in prison, but she kept planting. And whenever she planted a tree, she helped bury fear.

She said, "Fear is the biggest enemy you have. Fear stops us. Courage is as simple as saying no to fear."

Courage is as simple as being too busy to fear. Friends, say no to fear, to doubt, despair, faithless longing for what isn't, to see with clarity what is, and what can be. We don't have time to fear, to doubt, for despair.

"Lord, I keep so busy working for the Kingdom, keep so busy working for the Kingdom, keep so busy working for the Kingdom, ain't got time to die.

Cause when I'm feeding the poor I'm working for the Kingdom, feeding the poor, I'm working for the Kingdom, feeding the poor, I'm working for the Kingdom, ain't got time to die."