

(For Monday, December 12, 2016) **Who's watching you?**

*Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. (Lk.22:43 – NRSV)*

The night of his betrayal, God sent an Angel to Gethsemane to give Jesus strength. The Father would not eliminate Christ's pain. But he sent him help in the midst of that anguish. Contrary to countless books on "Self-Help," the Good News of Jesus Christ does NOT promise a painless life. Far from it! Yes, sometimes God does calm the storms in the midst of our life. But more often, He calms his child in the midst of the storm. Not only was God watching over his Son that night as Jesus wept blood in the garden. Someone else was watching too – someone who recorded this anguish and the Angelic visitor. We Christians are involved in producing "witness" to the truth. And a part of that responsibility means that most of the time we are being watched and observed by others to see if we really do live into our name as "The Little Christs," the original meaning of the word "Christian."

Who will be watching you today to receive an affirmation about how God's children live?

(For Tuesday, December 13, 2016) **Are you letting God's Spirit carry you?**

*"For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." (2Pet.1:21 – ESV)*

I love this image of being carried along by God's Spirit. The Greek verb Peter writes here is also used in Acts Chapter 2 to describe the way the Holy Spirit rushed into the Disciples to inspire their speaking on that first Day of Pentecost. There is also deep emotion tied to this verse. Peter was always putting his foot in his mouth when he was with Jesus. He is an emotional man, and prone to fits of enthusiasm. So, he is likely to give free reign to those emotions, declaring things like, "Lord even though everyone else desert you, I never will." (See Mt.26:33) But at this point near the end of his life, Simon Peter has learned that the most genuine form of enthusiasm, the only kind that will inevitably lead us toward God is that breathless wonder that comes from the Holy Spirit's indwelling in us.

Are you letting God do the heavy lifting in your life?

(For Wednesday, December 14, 2016) **Do you have an "Attitude of Blessing"?**

*"I implore your favor with all my heart; be gracious to me according to your promise." (Ps.119:58 – NRSV)*

You often hear people speaking of the "chicken or egg" dilemma, in reference to a situation where it's difficult to differentiate between a cause and its effect. David seems to have hit on the same situation with this verse from Psalms. He has come to realize that in order to receive the full blessing that God has promised him, he has to realize whole-hearted devotion to The Lord. He needs to acquire the right, humble, grateful and sincere attitude toward God. That way, he places himself in the spiritual posture to receive the full richness of God's grace. Devotion and blessing – you can't have one without the other. Jesus' younger brother James says something similar when he writes, *"You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly..."* (Jas.4:3b-4a - RSV) When life seems especially hard or empty it's wise to take inventory of just how fully devoted you are to The Lord.

How's your "Spiritual posture" been lately?

(For Thursday, December 15, 2016) **How thankful are you...no... really, just how thankful are you?**

*“Those who bring thanksgiving as their sacrifice honor me...” (Ps.50:23a)*

In *For the Life of the World* Alexander Schmemmann writes that the real Fall of Man was his lack of gratitude to God. It is only with that deepest of gratitudes inspired by God’s Holy Spirit in the realization of just what The Christ has done for us, that our hearts are made truly opened to God’s grace. Jesus was really ticked off was when the Pharisees got all bent-out-of-shape because he wanted to heal somebody on the Sabbath Day. (See Mk.3:1-6) Their hearts had become so closed that they were much more concerned about obeying the rules than experiencing the presence of God in their midst. Are we ever like that? There is so much wrapped up in a sincere “Thank you.” And part of that is the realization of how unworthy we ALL are to receive what God yearns to give his children. But if we accept God’s redemption with an attitude of entitlement, where’s the glory in that?

Have you counted your blessings lately? And then, have you thanked God for them?

(For Friday, December 16, 2016) **How does God speak to you?**

*“...but [Balaam] was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with a human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.” (2Pet.2:16 – NRSV)*

It is astonishing to look back over your life and realize the lengths to which God has gone in order to get your attention. And sometimes these attention-getting strategies involve other than human means. The beauty in a sunrise, the peace of nesting doves, the infinite might of the ocean – all of these can reaffirm the presence of the Creator God, if our minds and hearts are tuned-in to what he is trying to convey to his children. And it is my experience that God’s measures are often whimsical. But we shouldn’t be surprised by that. After all, God invented laughter. And whimsy is truly good for the soul. Balaam needed a donkey to speak in order to get his attention. But I sure hope that God doesn’t have to go so such lengths with me in order to make me focus on His blessings in my life.

How has God spoken to you lately with the whimsical elements of his creation?