

May 24 - Saturday

*O Israel, hope in the LORD
from this time on and forevermore.*

Psalm 131:3

One of the astounding pictures from the recent devastating earthquake in China was the one taken by a photographer named Wang Qiang for a bride and groom together with their wedding entourage. The setting was the beautiful and scenic Church of the Anunciation built by the French a hundred years ago at the city of Pengzhou. It said that the place was a favorite spot for picture taking. In the midst of this happy occasion the terrible earthquake strikes the area causing massive destruction to property and loss of precious lives, the most painful of all, were the death of children who were in their schools at that moment.

The scenes radically shift from the serene view of the church to that moment when bricks were falling and the dust that covered the whole area settled in the faces and the elegant dress of the couple. Then a frame depicts the debris that were scattered all over the place transforming the once idyllic view into a chaotic mess. Clearly, the eyes of those who lived through the experience project a sense of shock and unbelief.

Going through that horrible experience definitely will be unforgettable for those who survived. It will trigger a lot of questions and will surely bring one into a reflective mood. We may not go through an earthquake scenario but life can also drastically change from being calm and quite to something earthshaking and then into that moment when everything settles again. On that very moment when you rest and are in the quiet mood – you can ponder what you had been through and where will you be in the future.

The Psalmist went through these movements – from the comfort and security of home to that tiresome and exhausting journey up into the hills of Jerusalem, to that moment when the Psalmist deliberately entered into a posture of total rest and absolute silence. Then the Psalmist reaffirmed what the people had known before and what made them what they were at that moment – their hope in

the Lord. No one can proceed with life without hope.

Some of those who survived the earthquake were not physically blemished but were profoundly wounded emotionally and spiritually. Losing a child in a country where “one child policy” is strictly followed is enough to crush the spirit. Those who put their hope in their child would be at a loss. The future for them is just shut off. Where do you put your hope? For the Psalmist and for all of us who share the faith can say, “*hope in the LORD from this time on and forevermore.*”

Prayer

*O Lord, our God
in you we put our hope. Amen.*



May 23 - Friday

*But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a child quieted at its mother's breast;
like a child that is quieted is my soul.*

Psalm 131:2

How long can you sustain silence? Not that easy, many are uncomfortable with prolonged silence. Notice that uneasiness when someone is asked to pray and then it will take sometime for the first word to be said. Or that moment of silence in worship, some expect it to last just 3 seconds but when it goes beyond a minute or two, the restlessness will be more pronounced. We who are used to close our eyes when praying, most often cannot help but open our eyes and see for ourselves if something is wrong. Why is it that the person assigned to pray will not utter a word or why did it take so long for that moment of silence?

For many of us, words and sounds and movements are signs of life. Silence is the main interruption of life. Many cannot endure silence

for to them silence is the opposite of being alive. But sages of old remind us that silence is the foundation of life upon which words and sounds and movements are laid. It is not the silence that breaks the momentum of life it is rather our seemingly endless activity and our anxious restlessness that breaks the silence and the stillness that was present even before time and will be there even when we are all gone. In fact, this is where all of us will be ushered in the years ahead, in the midst of quiet and stillness rather than in the midst of noise or sound, however pleasant it may be, so many of the sages call for the practice and the discipline of silence.

The Psalmist gives a picture of a quieted child. Other translations described this as a weaned child, a “weaned child with its mother.”(KJV) I remember the process of weaning as progression from a loud cry of protest unto that quiet stillness. It will take sometime for the baby to know that life is possible even if the mother’s milk is not available anymore. But the assuring presence and the warm embrace of the mother is good enough for any child to know that he or she will not go to sleep hungry. The Psalmist uses this as a descriptive image, “*like a child that is quieted is my soul.*” Picture yourself, a child sleeping soundly and silently in the mother’s chest – can your soul be at peace like this child, resting silently, calmly, quietly.

Prayer

*O God, enable us to draw deep
the silence that our soul needs. Amen.*



May 22- Thursday

*O LORD, my heart is not lifted up,
my eyes are not raised too high;
I do not occupy myself*

*with things too great
and too marvelous for me.*

Psalm 131:1

“Stop, Look and Listen.” These are the rules taught to children when crossing the street. There is even a song that makes this message easy to remember – “pepeep, small jeep is running down the street, stop, look and listen...” Today, I am not sure how children are taught about lessons on road safety but childhood memories of this song props up from time to time, especially in moments when I am a bit careless in crossing the street.

Psalm 131 is labeled as songs of ascent. These are Psalms that people sing when they climb to the hills of Jerusalem to attend the several feasts in a year. There were no 4 x 4 pickups to ride then so it will take sometime for people to reach the city on a hill. As they slowly negotiate its dusty and rocky road, people sing songs to center their thoughts on God and to make the journey lively and keep them in a right mood and spirit.

While walking even on a short distance, our minds are usually occupied with thoughts, many thoughts. Sometimes we bump others or some objects because our mind is somewhere else. The Psalmist is describing a posture in life that we need to capture from time to time. The writer express to God what this posture is all about - *my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.* It is a complete stop to what we usually do – just stop and savor the moment.

Prayer

*O God, teach us
to stop and pause and rest. Amen.*



May 21 - Wednesday

*Therefore do not pronounce judgment
before the time,
before the Lord comes,
who will bring to light
the things now hidden in darkness
and will disclose the purposes of the heart.
Then each one will receive commendation from God.*

1 Corinthians 4:5

Imagine if you can see the heart, this is the line of a commercial of a heart medication. Seeing the heart function fully enables medical practitioners to diagnose and take care of the heart when the need arises. The heart from a Biblical perspective is more than a pump machine for the blood. The heart is the center of our being. Jesus once reminded us that *“out of the fullness of the heart, the mouth speaks.”* (Matthew 12:34b) The heart is our central link to God.

God’s judgment in Paul’s account *“brings to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.”* The capacity to see the heart includes the ability to discern the heart. Only God can discern truly the heart of a person. We may have occasional glimpse or partial disclosure of a person’s heart but no one can really know for sure what is inside the heart. Even good and pure intentions from our perspective should be subjected to God’s judgment for at times our own self-interests are hidden behind it. We get a sense of this truth occasionally but there are times when we are blinded by the ‘goodness’ of our cause that we need to see it again in God’s light.

Only God discloses the purposes of the heart and only God judges. This thought makes us utterly humble and should prevent us from the tendency to quickly condemn and outrightly dismiss others. It reminds us also that whatever opinions we have are tentative in nature until God gives the final word. Jesus gives us an idea of how comprehensive God will be when that day comes. He said; *“I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”* (Matthew

12:36-37). On that day, Paul assured us that “*each one will receive commendation from God.*” So let us take care of our heart the center of our being, the fountain from which words spring and let us continually pray “*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.*” (Psalm 51:10) for at the end God will disclose the purposes of our hearts.

Prayer

*Cleanse our heart O God
and make it resonate and rhyme
in harmony with your rhythm. Amen.*



May 20 - Tuesday

*But with me it is a very small thing
that I should be judged by you
or by any human court.
I do not even judge myself.
I am not aware of anything against myself,
but I am not thereby acquitted.
It is the Lord who judges me.*

1 Corinthians 4:3-4

Remember the quote, “*Don’t judge the book by its cover?*” We may not be a judge in a court of law that decides litigations but we do judge in some measure in our day to day life. At times, we judge people in the way they dress, the way they speak or they way they conduct themselves. Even in church setting, the place where everybody should be received and accepted as they are, many find themselves doing the judgment as to who should be “in” or “out” with the group. At times, the decision is more pronounced and blunt but in some cases it comes in a subtle way. It comes with a starring eye, a sharp rebuke or in a worst case scenario a court

order itself. The warm welcome and reception or the cold and conditional treatments are in itself indicators. Those who will be rejected are made to feel that they do not belong to the group.

Conflicts in church are most often nasty and generally betray the faith and spirit that the community proclaims. It does not mean that there should be no disagreement in the church. There are always different views as many as there are diverse members but the bottom line rest on how we handle our disagreements or even our conflicting views that will allow us to expose the brilliance of the light of faith in us or the darkness of the wild wickedness concealed behind righteous indignation and unfounded judgment. The church in Corinth was in the middle of an intense rivalry between factions aligned with Paul and those who sided with Apollos.

Paul pleading the church to receive them as servants and stewards rests his case to a higher authority by proclaiming “it is the Lord who judges me.” At times there are situations in life when we have no other recourse but to rest in the Lord’s judgment. Even though we know what is in our heart but like Paul we say, ‘I am not hereby acquitted’ and we humbly plead our case to the Lord on bended knees and tears of sorrow and sadness -- the Lord who is just, the Lord who judges the living and the dead, the Lord who judges our own frail and faulty judgments.

Prayer

*You alone O God
judges us and anybody else.
Whisper to us this truth
when we start judging others
and much more when we judge ourselves. Amen*



May 19 - Monday

*Think of us in this way,
as servants of Christ
and stewards of God's mysteries.
Moreover, it is required of stewards
that they be found trustworthy.*

1 Corinthians 4:1-2

How do you want to be viewed by others? What is your self-image? The answers to these questions provide a clue to how we live our lives. Paul desired that the church in Corinth view him and Apollos as servants and stewards. In a world where rank and status matters most being regarded as servants and stewards is not pleasing. Being masters and owners would be the best choice.

Jesus said this about himself, “*For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.*” (Mark 10:45a). The church later gave the title Lord in defiance to the claim that the Emperor is Lord. It means that life is lived in absolute obedience to Jesus alone and to him all service is joyfully rendered. “Jesus is Lord” was the church earliest statement of faith and to say that was seditious. But in his teaching Jesus admonish his disciples that those who wish to be great must serve and those who seek to be first must be slave. (Matthew 20:26-28). Paul takes his cue from Jesus, “*think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God’s mysteries.*”

Being a steward is also a treasured vocabulary in our faith. A steward is ‘one to whom the head of the house or proprietor has entrusted the management of affairs.’ We view all that we have and all that we are in the light of being a steward. God is the head, the owner, the master and we are stewards, trustees to everything we possess. When chosen as a steward it means that one is worthy of the trust of the owner. Being trustworthy is not a one shot deal. One has to prove again and again that indeed he or she can be trusted.

Servants and stewards, this is Paul’s choice. What do you want people think of you? We can complete this sentence, “think of me as” You can pick your choice ranging from being the master

and the captain of our lives to being servants and stewards of the Lord.

Prayer

*O Lord, our God
Teach us to think rightly
on what we ought to be
and help us live our lives
in accordance to what we desire. Amen.*