

Walking Backward Into the Future
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John 14:1-14

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I can't deny it! The "empty nest" syndrome is coming in the not so far future. A few weeks ago, my son David and some friends made a visit to a university in Minneapolis. In that two day trip I became keenly aware that soon our last off-spring would be leaving home in a little over a year. Mentally, I knew that day would come. We have already sent one son off to college. Visiting that university eroded that emotional denial. In the near future the house will be a little lonely for Diana and me.

This is an anxious time for parents. I find myself asking other parents who have already experienced the empty nest, how are things for them? Most everybody says it is "wonderful". It is a lot easier to keep the house from looking like a freak snow storm occurred on the inside of the house instead of outside. The water bill is reduced to half. However, the telephone bill doubles due to collect calls. Parents are anxious about the empty nest because their relationship could change. Will they recapture some lost romance or will their relationship turn into the gunfight at the OK Corral?

As happy Christian persons we can face the future fear and trepidation. Old cliches are used to handle that fear. "Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die." Follow that and how will we be prepared for the expense of a child's college education? How will we be prepared for retirement and old age?

I. FEAR OF THE FUTURE

We're almost ashamed to admit that we are happy people with troubled hearts. Our businesses are doing well for the most part. We have shoes to wear and places to go, but we are troubled. The largest concentration of teenage suicides is found in the north shore of Chicago, one of the most affluent spots in America. We are happy but troubled about the future.

A. Such was the case of Jesus' disciples. Jesus has told the disciples that he will be leaving them. This new information is disturbing for the disciples. Things had been going well for them. They had experienced the emotional high of a royal and kingly procession with palms. Their minds and hearts had been opened up to theological truths. Now Jesus tells them that he will be leaving them. Thomas expresses their collective fear: "Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" These were happy people worried about the future.

B. We can be happy but troubled about the future in the little events of life. When we are boarding a plane, we wonder if that plane is going to land safely at our destination. Last February I boarded a plane to fly to Ga. to visit my parents. I don't usually fly that much, so as the stewardess explained how to use the oxygen mask in case of cabin decompression, I prayed.... for the pilot, his family, the copilot, the plane, the controller in the tower and anyone else I could think of that had any control on the flight of that aircraft. Lewis Grizzard, the syndicated columnist said that he actually wasn't afraid of flying. "Its the prospect of crashing and burning to a crisp that scares me."

1) In our fear we try hard to pierce the darkness of the future to see what is coming. On a global level, we want to know what will be the effect of holes in the

ozone layer? How long will the world's supply of oil last? What will be the effect of deforestation? In religious circles Hal Lindsey used Biblical apocalyptic material to predict the "end times" in his book *The Late Great Planet Earth*. Environmentalists using scientific methods predict that a global warming is coming and that we must have more environmental studies. The economist Thomas Sewell responds by saying that "thank heaven there was no (environmentalist) when the dinosaurs were around, or there wouldn't be any human beings today." In other words, they would have preserved the dinosaurs. To the average lay person concerned about both the economy and environment, we don't know who to believe.

2) On a more personal level, we want to know what is in the future for our children. We want to know when we become old, will we still be able to drive a car and do the things we enjoy. Children of aged parents wonder "what will happen to father, if mother dies" or vice-versa. With all the hostile takeovers, people worry about their jobs and their careers. So you watch for any signs that might indicate a buy out or a reorganization might be in the near future.

C. Since we are not able to penetrate the future, we try to prepare for the future. We purchase life insurance, car insurance, malpractice insurance, home insurance and even kidnap insurance. That's right, "kidnap insurance." The Lloyd's of London have been offering such a policy since the kidnapping of Charles Lindbergh's son in 1932. With all the medical life support systems we try to have some control over our dying. Many people have already secured a "living will" in order to insure that their dying will be with dignity.

As we consider the future of the world, our personal futures, we fear what may come. So, we try to predict what will occur or we try to prepare for the worst.

II. WALKING BACKWARD INTO THE FUTURE

In our text, Jesus calls upon the disciples to leave their fears behind, to "let not their hearts be troubled." He extends that same call to us and also Jesus offered some suggestions that are still appropriate.

A. Ironically, he suggested to the disciples and to us to remember the marvelous experiences of the past. "Remember the healings, the raising of the dead, the feeding of the thousands. Let those memories bring you strength to face the future."

1) Contented and yet troubled about our future, we can remember the goodness of God in the past. We can remember the times when it seemed like God must have had a guardian angel watching over us.

Late one Friday night a high school friend and myself left Thomaston, Ga. where we had been cruising, for a party in our home community 20 miles away. We were late and wanted to arrive before some of our friends went home.

We took a short-cut on a mountain road my friend knew. He became my high speed navigator, informing me when to slow down for the next curve and when to apply the brakes. Fortunately, we made it without an accident and without my parents finding out about this hair-brained ride in the family car. If they had ever found out, I wouldn't be here. I would still be grounded.

I look back on that night sometimes and shudder at what could have happened but by the providence of God it didn't.

2) As we face the future we do so with the memory of those who touched us and willed to us a legacy of faith. For many of us this is our parents and particularly our mothers. In the will of Henry J. Heinz, the wealthy distributor of Heinz 57 Varieties, there was confession. In the last part Heinz wrote: "...I have been wonderfully sustained by my faith in God through Jesus Christ. This legacy was left me by my consecrated mother, a woman of strong faith, and to it I attribute any success I have attained." As we face the future, remember how God inspired our faith in our relationships of the past.

I realize that on this very day there are people who couldn't attend worship this morning because death is near at hand. The faith that has been built from years of relationship with God will sustain them no matter what comes. The story is told of Samuel Upham, a former teacher at Drew Theological Seminary. This man of great learning, wit and deep faith was dying. His family gathered around his bedside. Someone perceived that they thought Dr. Upham had already passed. A family member suggested they "feel of his feet, that no one ever died with warm feet. At this, Samuel Upham opened one eye and said "Joan of Arc did." These were his last words. His wit and humor expressed his deep faith and he faced the future without fear.

B. I am very much aware that many of us can look back into those memory backs at a time when it seemed as though God was any place but with you. Your worst fear has occurred. You lost a loved one in a tragic accident. A long time family business went up in fire and smoke. Somehow, through that, God sustained you with his promise: "Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted." And even if we fail to remember his promise to us God didn't forget or the fact that we were hurting.

C. Jesus reminds the disciples and us to face the future knowing that God is with us. "If you believe in me," he says, "you will continue to experience those marvelous works of the past, but possibly in different forms. While we must keep our eyes on the horizon or the stars as Columbus said, it is useful also to cast a backward glance. The past is prologue but it is all that we know anything about. God's touch in our past inspires us to push on into the future.

CONCLUSION

In a year or so my wife Diana and I will experience the empty nest syndrome. Many of you face even more challenging changes. Listen and hear what H.H. Hover wrote:

I have an insurance policy. Written in the blood of the Lamb,
Sealed by the Cross of Jesus, Redeemable wherever I am!
The company will never go bankrupt, It is bonded by God's promise true;
It will keep every word of its contract, Exactly what it says it will do.
I don't have to die to collect it, No premiums do I have to pay;
All I do is keep God's promise And walk in His holy way.
No collector will ever come calling, It is paid on Calvary's tree;
It insures me for living and dying, And for all eternity. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Dear God of all life; make us grateful this morning for the sense of seeing, of smelling, of hearing, of feeling, of tasting. Make us very sensitive to all expressions of your grace in the world about us; the glory of the morning, the refreshment of the cool breeze; the technicolor of life--in the tree, the shrub, the flower, the sky and the sea.

If in the midst of all color we find ourselves yawning with boredom at life, take the dimness of our soul away. Provoke us from conforming ways that we may be transformed from within by the renewing of our minds.

If we are young, and all our hopes and dreams are snarled and tangled; grant us such wisdom and insight that we may possess our souls with hope for a destiny that includes your call in our lives.

If we are mature, and the anxieties and fears are worse confounded by the fury of the age, keep us steady with the strength of such remembrances as we have of you and thy grace in days gone by. May we confront the world and the future with quiet minds and resourceful hearts, knowing the victory which is in a faith in you.

And if we stand midway in life, having seen one world depart and waiting for another not yet born, with youth behind us and age before us, we pray that you will teach us how to make all our years ascend from glory to glory. May we become as children of the morning in the Kingdom of the Spirit.

In whatever may come in life, may we remember your promises and reach out for your love. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.