

Looking for the Light

a devotional from
ST. CHARLES AVENUE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Saturday, May 2, 2020

by Richard D. Ashmore

Read:

Ezekiel 34:1-6

34 The word of the Lord came to me: ² "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? ³ You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. ⁴ You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. ⁵ So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. ⁶ My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them.

Reflect:

Since Covid-19 has become a central feature of my life, I believe that God has been talking to me more often and more insistently than usual. The overall message: Richard, you take too much for granted; your life is a gift; please do not squander it. Here are some of the specific heavenly nudges.

God has suggested that I slow down (I have spent most of my life hurrying to get some task done) and instead, in the words of Baba Ram Das, "be here now." God has forcefully reminded me, "Yesterday is history; tomorrow is a mystery; today is the **present**." I was taking for granted that I would always have tomorrow. I may not. At some point, I will not.

God has also reminded me of the value of family and friends, more forcefully as I am physically cut off from them. I have been more in contact (via phone, text, Zoom) with my sisters since the stay at home order began than ever before. I have reached out to friends around the world since Covid came to town. What the heck was I waiting for? I was taking for granted that my friends and family would always be here on earth. They will not be.

And then God asked Sarah to ask me to do the devotional for today which led me to the above verses from the Bible. I have taken for granted so many people who each day work to make my life easy and pleasant and safe. Through the Covid crisis they continue to do so at great risk to themselves and their families. I am the shepherd who eats well and clothes himself and does not seek out the vulnerable to be of assistance (Ezekiel 34:3). Recently we had chicken for dinner. I did this with no consciousness of, and no gratitude for, all those who made this possible, now under very difficult conditions. I took for granted the people who work under horrible conditions in meat packing plants, the truckers who can't shelter in place, the checkers at Rouse's who only recently got Plexiglas shields. The list of those I have taken for granted could go on and on. Why do I need a pandemic to be fully aware of this?

I am thankful that God talks to me in ways even I cannot miss and also that God gives me so many second chances to learn to be the shepherd to others that I am intended to be.

Ask:

What and who have I/we taken for granted?

Who are those without an earthly shepherd? (Ezekiel 34: 1-6)

Who are those I/we have allowed to be "ruled...harshly and brutally"? (Ezekiel 34: 4c)

How might I/we strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bind up the injured, bring back the strays, and search for the lost? (Ezekiel 34: 4a, b)

Pray:

Dear God,

We thank you for the gift of your creation. We thank you for reminding us that we are to be good shepherds for all creatures in this creation. Some of us are very slow learners. We know that you will not give up on us. Please help us to never take for granted your steadfast love for us.

Amen.

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