

June 6, 2021

Light And Momentary?

Texts: **Psalm 130; 2 Corinthians 4: 13-5:1**; "Power and Love", from *The Jesus I Never Knew*, by Philip Yancey

I once read a wonderful description of a movie that was being shown on Turner Classic Movies. The blurb - that little one sentence summary they give you in TV Guide to tell you what the movie is about - was written by TV columnist Rick Polito in 1998, and I want you to try to guess what movie it is for:

"Transported to a surreal landscape, a young girl kills the first person she meets and then teams up with three strangers to kill again."

Listen to it again for a second: "Transported to a surreal landscape, a young girl kills the first person she meets and then teams up with three strangers to kill again." Do you know what movie that blurb was for? Probably not. That was a blurb for the Wizard of Oz! Oz is the surreal landscape, Dorothy is the girl, the Wicked Witch of the East is the first person she meets and kills when her house lands on her, the three strangers she teams up with to kill again are the Scarecrow, the Tin Man and the Cowardly Lion, and, of course, their "victim" is the Wicked Witch of the West. "Transported to a surreal landscape, a young girl kills the first person she meets and then teams up with three strangers to kill again."

It's considered the best blurb ever written because it is so clever and funny and yet also insightful about the power of diction, of the words we choose to describe something. Polito's blurb demonstrates how something very familiar can be made to seem strange and unfamiliar by the right words, how a beloved children's movie can be made to seem like a horrible crime drama by a selective reading of the plot. It's such a different way of looking at the Wizard of Oz that we don't even recognize one of the greatest movies of all time, but on reflection, we have to admit that the blurb isn't wrong, it doesn't say anything that's not true, but it certainly isn't the whole story.

I couldn't help but think something similar when I read Paul's blurb about this earthly life this morning: "Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." Light and momentary troubles? That's what this is, this world of pain and suffering, this world of heartache and loss? Our troubles are light and momentary? Why, I no more recognize that world as the one I live in than you recognized Polito's description of Dorothy's trip to Oz! Light and momentary? It sure doesn't seem that way. Just ask even someone as exalted as the President! He lost his 46 year old son, Beau Biden, to brain cancer. There's nothing light and momentary about that. But it gets worse. President Biden is no stranger to tragedy. Back in 1972, when he was first elected, he was in Washington hiring staff as a new Senator, exultant in victory, rejoicing in power, when he got a terrible call. His wife and three children had been out Christmas shopping – Christmas shopping! – and a tractor trailer broadsided their car and killed his wife and one year old daughter. And they weren't sure his sons, one of whom was Beau, the other the now famous Hunter, were going to live.

Beau and Hunter did live, but now Beau is gone, too. The President recalled that terrible event in his life in a speech in 2012 to families of fallen military service members. He ended his speech by saying, "There will come a day -- I promise you, and your parents as well -- when the thought of your son or daughter, or your husband or wife, brings a smile to your lips before it brings a tear to your eye." He said, "It will happen." Light and momentary indeed. He's still suffering almost 50 years later, those families are suffering, people right here in our congregation are suffering in mind and body. A year of pandemic, and practically every person on earth been suffering! Paul, what are you talking about? Light and momentary. Maybe *you* can say that, but the rest of us out here in the real world, we're

hurting, man, we're hurting, physically, emotionally, spiritually, we're hurting. Paul's version of life sounds a bit like that Wizard of Oz blurb: disconnected from reality.

But if we dismiss Paul too quickly, we might miss something else that Paul is trying to say, we might miss something deeper. A blurb is not the full story. You see, Paul wasn't a guy who led a charmed life, a guy who never felt any pain himself, a guy who could glibly smile a Bible quote at you through your tears without any real understanding of what you were going through. Not many lines later in his letter, Paul tells the Corinthians about his own experience of life. Here is his own summary of his own light and momentary troubles: "I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?" That's not an easy life. That's not drifting through with a silver spoon. This isn't some guy who was born on third base and thinks he's hit a triple! Paul has had his share of sufferings, more than his share.

So what is he talking about with this light and momentary stuff? Paul is talking about this life in the light of eternity. He's talking about it in the light of forever. Yes, he says, outwardly we are wasting away. Our bodies are getting older, they're breaking down, we have pain in our feet *or* in our knees *or* in our back *or* in our shoulders, or in our feet *and* our knees *and* our back *and* our shoulders. So yes, absolutely, we experience suffering and loss and that sometimes seems to be all there is to life, and nothing more, but it's not. There is more, there's more, there's more to life than that.

Paul says we have to look harder, we have to look deeper, we have to look at what we know inside of ourselves, *what* we know is coming because of *who* we know, Jesus Christ. If we take our eyes off all the troubles on the outside and we look inside, we see something different. We don't see just troubles, light, momentary or otherwise, we see hope. Look inside, and we are being renewed day by day.

What Paul means by that is, inwardly, we are finding a way to keep going because we know that something better is coming, we know that there will be an end to pain, an end to suffering, an end to heartache and an end to death. Outwardly, it seems miserable, there is no hope, but inwardly we live in hope, we breathe hope, we exude hope, because inwardly, as Paul says, we have the Spirit of God talking to our spirit, and so inwardly, "we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus." We can do this because we see more than just this world around us. We can do this because we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, because all of this stuff that we see around us, all of this pain and suffering and death, all of this separation from the ones we love, it's just temporary, it's just for now, but it's not forever.

Paul is looking forward to the day when we have been with God and with our loved ones in God's realm for a hundred years, a thousand years, a million years. Paul is looking forward to the time when we look at each other, we and the ones we love, and we try to remember what it was like on earth when there was suffering, when we try to remember what it was like to feel the pain of separation from our loved ones, when we try to remember what death was like and how afraid we were, and we almost can't because it was so long ago and so far away. Paul is thinking of what it will be like when we've been there a billion years, in God's light and love, in joy, with God and with each other, and we reflect on the life we lived so long ago that got us there, on the pain and the suffering and the fear of death

that drove us into Christ's arms and into Christ's love. And in that length of eternity, when we look back, in that length, we will consider our earthly life as full of nothing but light and momentary troubles.

Yes, says Paul, we know that this earthly tent we live in, this body of ours, we know it will be destroyed, but it doesn't matter, because we have a better place to live, we and all our loved ones, we have an eternal home, a house built by God, a new body, a resurrection body, a body which will last forever. From this point of view, from eternity, it is not Paul whose blurb of life is wrong and misleading, it's ours. It's not Paul who doesn't get it, it's us. We are watching the same movie, but Paul is seeing it more clearly because he has seen the end, and we haven't, he can put everything in context and we can't, or at least, we couldn't until now, when Paul has helped us to see that there is much more to God and life than we could imagine! In the Wizard of Oz, it's the tornado that connects Dorothy's world to the world of Oz, or maybe it's an injured girl's imagination, but in our world, what connects us and where we live to God's kingdom is Christ, and this bread and this wine which is his body, which is his blood, which is his sacrifice for us, his suffering for us, which won us an eternal weight of glory, an eternal life in God's kingdom.

So let us follow Paul's advice, and fix our eyes not on what is seen, on the bread and the wine, on the sufferings of this world, but on what is unseen, the presence of Christ in our midst and the reality of eternal life which lies before us. Let us take a break from our light and momentary troubles to try a taste of the eternal glory which far outweighs them all. Amen