

Selah: Stop, Look, Listen – June 25, 2020

The Lord be with you.

Now, there was a story going around about Satan having a big yard sale and Satan is selling office tools, he's selling off pride, envy, jealousy, hatred, things like that, and demons are showing up to buy... I wanna buy this tool, I wanna buy that one, but when the demon ask about a tool that's lying all by itself, over in a corner, Satan says No, no, no, no, keep your hands off of that one, not that one, that tool is not for sale. Why that tool has always been my best tool for attacking people, it's discouragement, discouragement works for me when all my other tools don't, Satan says... And he says, The good thing about discouragement is that people don't think of discouragement as coming from me.

Defensible story? Well, yes, but not so fencible. God's people sometimes do struggle with discouragement in following Jesus... Well, have a scripture for you today that helps me when I am discouraged in following Jesus, I'm looking at 2nd Corinthians, a book where discouragement is a pretty big issue. Paul opens up in chapter one talking about discouragement in his serving in Asia Minor, Paul talks about discouragement he's dealing with is he's facing problems in the Corinthian church. He talks about the discouragement of is very painful thorn in the flesh, and then the light breaks through, the light breaks through for Paul and his discouragement... Here it is, 2 Corinthians 2:14, I read, But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession and through us spreads in every place, the fragrance that comes from knowing him.

I've often said that the little three-letter word, but is one of my favorite words in the Bible, as it is a word that just turns everything around as it does here, but thanks be to God who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession.

As Paul lives life, he sees himself as following Jesus in his great victory parade, but Paul calls here in triumphal procession, and Paul is using here the imagery of a Roman triumphal procession, something that was well known in the ancient Roman world. It was something that was awarded to a general who was returning from a great victory in war. A Roman triumphal procession meant a magnificent entrance into Rome, it wasn't just any victory that was celebrated to be awarded a triumphant procession with its arch of triumph meant that all battles had to have been completed, finished. It meant that there was peace in that area, that troops were brought home. It meant the territory of the Roman Empire was extended through that victory, and a Roman triumphal procession was a Roman holiday, it was a day off for everyone to welcome the decorated general as he enters Rome standing in his ornate chariot, pulled by four white horses and all along the way, people are cheering and throwing flowers. Behind the general, marches soldiers, they are victors with him, and then come the spoils of war, captive kings and princes that are followed by people burning incense and spreading the fragrance of victory all along the way.

So do you hear what Paul is saying to us in this verse? Paul is saying that Jesus is leading us in his great triumphal procession. Christ has won a great victory. Christ has defeated his enemies and our enemies, sin and death, and we are following Jesus in His triumph. So that contrary to appearances, today, you and I, we are in Christ's triumphal procession. Nothing stands in Christ's way as we

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follow him.

This makes me think of something Paul says over in Romans 8, where he has this long list of terrible things that could happen to us, and then in verse 37, Paul says, in all these things, in all these terrible things... In all these things, we are more than conquerors to him who loved us.

Sure, Paul was going through hard times in Asia Minor, going through hard times with the Corinthians, and you and I were going through some hard times with COVID-19 and all the uncertainty around us, but thanks be to God. Thanks be to God who in Christ always, always, that is no exception, always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us, in every place, he doesn't leave out any place, always every place. And through us in every place spreads the fragrance that comes from knowing him today.

Today, you and I are part of the victory parade, following Christ. Spreading the knowledge of Christ's victory.

Here's how Paul says it, through us spreads in every place, the fragrance that comes from knowing Christ.

The other day, my wife and I, we just happened to run into a man, we talked to him briefly, we really didn't know him, but after that brief encounter, I said to Rita... I said, you know, he's got to be a Christian. Why would I say that? Because there was a fragrance about him, there was about him, the fragrance that comes from knowing Christ.

So I just tell us that of our five senses, smell is the one we remember the longest... Well, I remember the smell of newly mowed grass on my little league baseball diamond. I remember the smell of the pine Christmas tree in my boyhood home. Paul says that as we follow Jesus, through us spreads in every place, the fragrance, the fragrance that comes from knowing Christ. In a Roman triumphal procession people would follow in the parade, burning incense and spreading the fragrance of victory.

So you and I, as we follow Jesus through all of our ups and downs, there spreads the fragrance that comes from knowing him. The Greek word translated here as fragrance is frequently used in the Old Testament for the sacrifices that are offered up to God as a sweet fragrance. Sometimes following Jesus in the path of victory does mean sacrifice, but as we live it, it goes up as a sweet savor to God and spreads to others the fragrance of knowing Jesus.

Paul uses the same Greek word, fragrance over Ephesians 5:2. Where he says, Live in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

In the midst of our struggles, perhaps discouragement, in the midst of COVID-19, a stock market bouncing all over the place, civil unrest, Christ is leading us. He is leading us in triumph, and we spread to those around us the fragrance that comes from knowing Christ.

So don't let Satan discourage you today.

I am Tim Smith, a fellow traveler on the pilgrim way. Thanks for listening until next time.

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