
Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

December 7, 2014

Plants of Steel

"I can endure all these things through the power of the one who gives me strength."
Philippians 4:13 (Common English Bible)

The garden center of Home Depot features a selection of plants ideal for home or office called, "Plants of Steel." They are plants that seem to thrive in apparent adversity. Where other plants would wilt for lack of water and sunshine these plants enjoy optimal vitality from neglect. I have purchased several of these plants and it is fascinating to watch them flourish in spite of – or because of – my inattention to their care. They seem to have a preference for hardship.

These plants offer an encouragement for the spiritual life. Difficult circumstances, though never sought, can provide growth. Such growth is clear in the lived experience of the apostle Paul. In this letter to the Church of Philippi, Paul is in captivity at Rome. His supreme mission of preaching the Gospel of Christ appears to be at an end. No longer does Paul have the stimulus of travel, the joy of enriching itineraries or the delight of preaching the good news over the broad landscape of Asia and Greece. That open road has been narrowed to the walls of a prison cell. Yet, there is an absence of gloom in Paul's writing. Throughout this letter of Philippians there is present an incomparable strength and beauty.

Paul's imprisonment does not usher in a season of gloom. Rather, what Paul experiences is a time of spiritual graces. He writes of losing everything for Christ only to realize that what he lost has no value compared to what he has gained in a relationship with Jesus. Within prison walls Paul realizes the broad range and wealth of his spiritual inheritance. While some of his friends referred to his misery, Paul writes of his joy. Though some regretted his poverty, Paul boasts of possessing all that he needs. What appears to be a season of winter for Paul is transformed to an opportunity to be clothed in a fleece robe of strength and hopefulness.

Some today become very poor in difficulty and adversity. When in the natural rhythm of life they reach desert places or what may feel as an endless winter of the soul, they live without any cheer. Sourness and fretfulness encompass them as the prison walls surrounded Paul. All of life becomes a menagerie of unpleasant things. Worse, they feel left alone. Paul's incredible witness is that this doesn't have to be their story. Paul writes letters from prison not to share his misery with a sympathetic ear. He writes to invest in others. Investments in other people, in the ministry of our Lord, scatter the gloom, brighten the place of our dwelling and preserve the leaf of our soul from withering. We become plants of steel! More, we will know such joy that the desert of the soul shall rejoice and blossom like a rose.

Prayer: *In the winter of the soul, help me to seek the face of Jesus, to invest in others and experience uncommon strength and joy. In the certain Name of my Lord, Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.*

Doug Hood