
Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

May 31, 2015

God's Ministry of Presence

“Don't fear, I am with you.”
Isaiah 43:5 (Common English Bible)

We live in anxious times. Anxiety about employment, our children and our future consumes a great deal of our time and energy. Little wonder that so many feel exhausted all the time. And it isn't unusual for exhaustion to give way to anger, particularly anger toward those closest to us. Anxiety equals exhaustion equals anger. This is a dangerous path. And it is a path that diminishes us.

The people of Israel are familiar with this path. Here in Isaiah, God's people have been held captive in a foreign land for a long time. They are wringing their hands, wondering if they will ever be released, if they will ever see home again. Anxiety is penetrating deep into their souls. With this anxiety we may suspect that exhaustion and anger are not far away, perhaps even defeat. So God comes to Isaiah with a message for the people of God: “Don't fear, I am with you.”

Anxiety is diminished when someone shares the moment with you. A simple gesture like taking someone's hand gently in yours or a softly spoken word of encouragement scatters the darkness of anxiety. This is often called the ministry of presence, the ministry that rescues us from feeling that we are all alone. The presence of another who cares deeply about us calms us and enlarges our vision for the possibility of something more.

So imagine what God's people must have experienced to hear that God is present, that God is with them in this moment of fear and anxiety. The long wait in captivity has made the people weary. Anxiety and exhaustion and discouragement and perhaps even anger are to be expected. But now they hear that in the midst of all that, God is there with them. That simple announcement changes everything. They are able to once again take a deep breath and hope again, and wait a little longer. Perhaps that is the most important reason for belonging to the church, to stand with one another and remind each other that we need not be afraid, that God is with us.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, nudge us and whisper to us, make Your presence with us unmistakable this day. Amen.

Doug Hood

Reprinted from Heart and Soul: Meditations to Encourage the Heart & Refresh the Soul, pg. 35, available in the welcome center in the Narthex.