

N U R T U R E
F A I T H
with
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Space Cowboy

READ: Deuteronomy 30:19, 20a (Common English Bible)

“I call heaven and earth as my witnesses against you right now: I have set life and death, blessing and curse before you. Now choose life - so that you and your descendants will live - by loving the Lord your God, by obeying his voice, and by clinging to him.”

REFLECT:

Occasionally I hear a song on the radio that is so raw, direct, and reflective that it grasps my heart and simply will not let go. Kacey Musgraves’ song, *Space Cowboy*, is the most recent addition to that canon of songs. Only two weeks ago did I hear this beautiful and haunting song on the radio and found that I was bound – heart, soul, and mind – by its lyrics. It simply would not let me go and I had not the slightest clue why. The basic narrative of the song is about finally letting go of a dying relationship and the deep sorrow that follows. Though heartbreak is deeply and powerfully infused in the lyrics, that narrative is not my narrative. In a few weeks I will celebrate thirty-one years of marriage and I have never stopped adoring my wife and finding imaginative ways of expressing my love for her.

What was inevitable for me was the decision to download this song onto my iPhone and listen to it again and again, not understanding the inescapable hold it had on my imagination. This morning, during my morning run – and listening to this song again and again on the “repeat” mode – the mist of confusion scattered and with piercing clarity heard what my subconscious had heard all along: Musgraves’ words have become God’s word to me, “You look out the window while I look at you.” Several weeks ago I turned fifty-eight, and that birthday gave me pause to ponder just how much of my life has been frittered away looking “out the window,” longing for something more.

It is difficult to appreciate and value a blessing you are standing right in the middle of when your gaze is out the window, wanting something else. And the whole time my focus is out that window, God’s focus is right on me, longing that I not let go of God’s claim on me; not letting go of God’s deep love for me. It is true that in my baptism I attached myself to God’s redemptive work in the world. But fundamentally, God demands less of me than what God desires to give me. But God’s gifts are inextricably bound to “obeying his voice, and by clinging to him.” Yet, God will not “close the gate” and “fence me in.” God sets before each of us the choice to “cling” to a deeply satisfying relationship with God or to pursue whatever it is we see out the window.

Rarely do I watch the video of songs I enjoy. Nancy Fine, my colleague in ministry, suggested to me this morning that I watch this video. The final scene is the clincher for me: as the lyrics repeat, “You can have your space, cowboy. I ain’t gonna fence you in. Go on, ride away in your Silverado” the young cowboy in question rides away. Musgraves is bathed in the soft light of the remaining light of dusk while dark clouds appear and close-in all around the one who chooses to leave. The implication is clear: what is “out the window” lacks the beauty of what is left behind. Here, in these words from Deuteronomy, God already knows that and pleases with us, “Choose life, choose me, choose us.”

