

## July 12

“My word...shall accomplish that which I purpose”, (Is. 55:11), and “The river of God is full of water” (Ps. 65:9), from our readings for last Sunday are two of the greatest texts of encouragement I know in all of Israel’s scripture, and are favorites of mine to meditate on, especially in times of trouble, doubt, and fear. God doesn't run out of energy or ideas when it comes to his creation.

I like to think—and I surely do hope—that each of us has a bedrock idea or statement from the Bible to turn to when trouble comes, when joy is fled, and when confidence is shaken. There are many texts that can serve this purpose, of course, and my two may not “ring a bell of shared conviction” for you. That’s fine. We all need our own sources of comfort and encouragement.

What I take from these two verses includes recognizing that my perspective and my capacity to appreciate what is going on in God’s wide world are limited. Nonetheless, I find myself comforted by the thought that the purposes of God shall be fulfilled because the divine resourcefulness, persistence, and faithfulness are greater than the human demands, resistance, and challenges to God’s intention.

You will notice what I am NOT saying. I am not saying that God is going to make things work out in the way I think I would prefer. There will not be a return to the world as it was six months ago. I am saying that I trust God is doing great and good things in the midst of this horrible disease time and that what God is doing is more than band-aids and mercurochrome—God is making something of this.

So what is the right attitude and outlook on life these days? How do these texts I put forward help us in the present time?

The two great public concerns now are about the pandemic and the cultural upheaval touched off by the Black Lives Matter protests (there are many other worthy concerns—climate change, for one, but where our public attention is fixed are the pandemic and BLM). In a way, our approach to one parallels our view of the other (I suspect the dichotomy continues as the issue list gets longer).

Just to say it, I am not claiming that my views and ideas are the only correct and useful perspectives on what we're dealing with. As our prayerbook has it, "I have followed too much the devices and desires of my own heart", and remind myself of this often.

All that said, it appears to me that people who downplay or dismiss concerns about covid-19 and resist medical advice about how to behave in the face of the pandemic are all too frequently people who resist dealing with the historic facts and effects of systemic and institutional racism, the reality of white privilege, and the scope and reach required to address these truths. Again, I am not claiming to know what's best about dealing with the pandemic and the realities of racism, I'm saying that where people deny the evidence—whatever the issue—bad things go on and worsen.

I'll go farther: I believe that the source of resistance to accepting medical advice and facing our national sin of racism are to be found in selfishness and greed. Once more, I am not telling anyone that "one size fits all" when it comes to pandemic response across our great and multi-circumstanced country, nor am I dictating the one and only path forward toward genuine racial equality and harmony. But any look at the resistance to accepting the reality of both the diseases of covid-19 and racism shows that resistance to be full of the rhetoric and behavior of self-centeredness and denial of plain facts. Disease and privilege are not matters of feeling or opinion or polite declarations to "agree to disagree". These things are real and measurable and they come with consequences—moreover, they can be dealt with through dedication, care, and fact-driven action.

My faith tells me that God's energy and ingenuity are at work, AND that God can and does spark creativity and commitment in his faithful people to look prayerfully and deeply at themselves and our world to see where our efforts, shaped by the gospel and the continuing grace of the Spirit, should be applied. But our outlook on what God is doing has to reach beyond our perceived benefit from it.

If we are willing and brave and trusting enough to explore what it means that God doesn't work for us, isn't at our beck and call, doesn't answer to us, what we find is a much richer sense of being part of creation, of being in the great story God is crafting.

What goes along with this viewpoint can be a bit costly, I have to admit.

We have to jettison the idea that we're God's special snowflakes and nothing bad will happen to us—and if something does go amiss, it has to have been a cosmic error that will get made up to us right quick, like a refund on Amazon.

As a lot of people, especially in the USA these days, seem to suppose that the germ theory of disease doesn't apply to them, that gravity and the rules of getting along in this life are somehow suspended for them, and they are not responsible for whatever they choose to disown, in the present time or from our history. In secular terms, we would say this is viewpoint creates and supports a sense of entitlement.

It also means we may have serious adjustments to make in our attitudes and outlook.

To be blunt about it, I say we cannot claim such exemptions and say that we are beloved creatures in God's creation. These are mutually exclusive outlooks on life.

Why am I making such a sweeping claim? Why do I press on the point that being self-centered is not a Christian outlook on life? I am emphatic because I'm convinced that many people do think they are exceptional, do believe they deserve extra credit, help, and exemption just for being alive, are convinced that they deserve whatever they can get for themselves, think themselves entitled to do as they please, and feel ill-used when they are challenged on their behavior and resentful about the facts of history, medicine, and the Christian faith.

One last thing—I'm not going to stop today without giving us all three concrete examples of actions that for me are full of hope and possibilities: Evanston (where I live) has decided by ballot initiative to dedicate a portion of the tax revenue received for medical marijuana sales to re-investment in our community, especially aimed at people of color (who, for decades, have been targeted and profiled by law enforcement for drugs—against all research and evidence); the Supreme Court has ruled (*Sharp vs Murray*) that about half the state of Oklahoma truly is native American reservation land because Congress admitted that territory into the Union without following proper procedures (conservative Justice Neil

Gorsuch was the critical vote); a private group (Second Foundation Partners) provides medical personnel with appropriate protection equipment without charge upon request—this is a relatively small private group that has overfunded the donation fund to such an extent that it no longer accepts contributions even now as the infection rates are rising. Truly, on levels large and small we can see signs that “the river of God is full of water”.