

April 3, 2021

Saturday

Looking Over the Edge

By Peg Wilken

Psalm 30:1-5, 10-12 ¹I will praise you, Lord, you have rescued me and have not let my enemies rejoice over me. ²O Lord, you have raised my soul from the dead, ³restored me to life from those who sink into the grave. ⁴Sing psalms to the Lord, you who love him, give thanks to his holy name. ⁵His anger lasts but a moment; his favor all through life. At night there are tears, but joy comes with the dawn... ¹⁰The Lord listened and had pity. The Lord came to my help. ¹¹For me you have changed my mourning into dancing, ¹²O Lord my God, I will thank you for ever.

Not to sound like a broken record, but 2020 was certainly a challenging year, and many of those challenges will continue into 2021 and beyond. For me, I call it my “year of looking over the edge.” What does that mean? Well, 2020 started for me with the sudden onset of a serious heart condition and two heart surgeries. Because it was sudden, I didn’t have a lot of time to worry in advance (I’m a world-class worrier). But in hindsight, I realized the closeness of death. It wasn’t that I was in imminent danger of death; it was the palpable realization that I’m not going to live forever and something will get me sooner or later. And that makes me “look over the edge” to really examine what I believe about life after death and my Christian belief in resurrection.

Then the pandemic hit and it made that “edge” ever more real, every day, in every mundane thing—like going to the store or visiting friends or going to church. As the year wore on, the fear of getting Covid-19 just increased. I know there are naysayers who think that our risks aren’t greater than the flu but as time goes by it becomes increasingly apparent that it is a real risk, especially for older people with underlying conditions. My wife and I both hit all the hot buttons for risk factors. We are still anxiously awaiting getting our vaccinations, but even that won’t end all of the fear.

Later in 2020, I underwent a total knee replacement which I've needed for years. The recuperation was more challenging than I anticipated and I had quite a bit of pain and difficulty sleeping for nearly 2 months after surgery—all of which messes with one's peace of mind.

So what's the point of all this? Well, I found that through these challenges, I could turn my focus inward and worry about myself and feel sorry for myself. Or I could choose to look outside. And I chose the latter. When I was worried, when I was in pain, when I couldn't sleep, I tried to remember the people for whom I promised to pray, people who I knew were hospitalized with Covid-19 or other problems. I turned my focus on trusting God (not always easy for me because I'm a control freak).

God's grace met me in the most powerful way during a hospital stay after surgery on my heart. My heart had gone into atrial fibrillation and was not correcting itself. I didn't want to have another surgery to correct it. After several hours, I reached a point where I just turned it over to God and breathed God's presence in and out deeply for several minutes, totally focusing on the Spirit flowing through me. And my heart rhythm corrected itself.

My goal in dealing with 2021's challenges is to try to remember that God's Spirit is alive always and working always. When I am worried or feeling discouraged by all the upheaval in life, that has been my source of strength. I'm "looking over the edge" and learning to trust that God is there and will always save me.

Prayer: God, you meet us at the edge, and in each and every precious moment of our lives. Thank you for making yourself known in times of difficulty. Help me learn to let go and turn my worries to you. Give me a trusting heart focused first on you, and then on the needs and concerns of others, I ask by the Saving Grace of Jesus Christ. Amen.