

Saturday, March 29

1 Peter 1:3-9

New hope in Christ

“new birth into a living hope.” Beverly Roberts Gaventa says it more baldly than I tend to say it, but she got it exactly right as far as I’m concerned: *Hope is not about us at all; it is God’s hope, that is, it is God’s future, not ours; and however wondrously and graciously it is for us, it is not about us.”*

As I read about China in the first half of the 17th century, the package of difficulties is chilling:

- a mini ice age reduced food, supplies & taxes
- a decimation of population – sounds like the plague
- pirates plundering the southern coast
- rebels controlling half the land southwest of Beijing
- armies killing women & children, burning cities
- ‘minorities’ forced to act in degrading ways
- Manchu warriors flooding south around The Wall

Ever hear of the Hundred Years War in Europe??

Peter makes it sound so ‘easy:’ *for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.* I’ve never been persecuted. I’ve never been threatened. I’ve never been jailed, or beaten, or interrogated, or questioned, or detained, or chained, or blinded, or . . . But many have. Many are. There are times and places when suffering is minimal, and others when it’s not. Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, ‘barbarians’ from the north – they all suffered, they all died, they all got their turn at being persecuted in the first half of the 17th century in southeast Asia. Where’s the hope?

Nicholas Wolterstorff penned a classic on grief a couple decades ago, Lament for a Son, when his son Eric died in an accident before reaching age 25. Last week an interviewer asked him about this book and how it ends with a vision of God bearing the suffering of the world in tears. He responded strongly: *My little book is not about grief. It is a cry of grief. I was in grief. My book is a grieving cry.* And he keeps asking, *Why does God permit what disturbs God? Why does God allow what God endures in tears? I do not know the answer. In faith I live the question.*

Ah so! The hope is God’s, not ours. The future is God’s, not ours. The faith is God’s, not ours. Trying to fathom ‘the mind’ of God may be great intellectual fun, but we come away empty-handed. Except for the gift – the gift of God’s hope to us, the gift of God’s faith in us, the gift of God’s future for us.

Jesus’ resurrection opens a window into a world, into a dimension, into a state, into a situation where God’s picture for us is visible. Thank God we can get a glimpse. Thank God we can touch a tiny tidbit. Thank God we can hear the hallelujah echoes. Thank God we can smell the smallest aroma – Praise be to God! By God’s mercy God has given us new birth. Help me, God, help me live this new.

A Way to Pray – pain

- Where does it hurt? body? mind? family? work? where?
- Let the pain be an empty room – walk in and sit down
- What do you see, smell, hear, feel?
- Ask Jesus to come in and sit with you in the pain room
- What do you see, smell, hear, feel?
- Hand the pain over to Jesus and walk out.