

Wednesday, March 26

Psalm 22:27-31

The word will spread

This is NOT our normal focus on Psalm 22. Having just come through Holy Week and Good Friday, the quotes in Matthew's and Mark's stories of Jesus' passion are loud and clear, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" The 'cry of dereliction' is it often called. A moment of indescribable loss. The worst. The details about reproach, despised, scorn, mocking, bulls-lions-dogs-wild oxen, piercing hands and feet, dividing garments, casting lots - they all sound like Jesus on that last day.

And then v. 21 (in the NKJV), 2nd half reverses all: "You have answered me." And the rest of Psalm 22 is one paean of praise after another. What a switch! What a reversal! What a change! No wonder some commentators on Matthew and Mark insist on reading the end of Psalm 22 and call Jesus' cry on the cross 'the cry of faith.'

Two phrases from the 'last half' of this Psalm ache as I read them this morning:

The poor shall eat and be satisfied - *verse 26*

All the prosperous of the earth shall eat and worship - *verse 29*

The Search for Modern China is the latest book I've picked up to learn about this world before we travel there April 21st. This expert, writing in 1990, argues that 'modern' = 'open', China isn't there yet, but has been 'searching' for it since 1600. Whew! That's a long time!

He chooses that arbitrary date because it appears (to insiders at the time) to be the high point of the Ming dynasty that had been ruling China since 1368, the latest in a series that is well documented over the last four thousand years. At the beginning of the 17th century, China's rulers and wealthy reveled in the embroidered silks, exquisite blue and white porcelain, glimmering lacquer, ornamental jade, feathery latticework, delicate ivory, cloisonne, and shining rosewood furniture. The prosperous of the earth ate well.

But not the poor (or even the not-so-poor). "Driven to desperation by high taxes and uncertain labor prospects, thousands of silk weavers in the Yangzi-delta city of Suzhou went on strike in 1601, burnt down houses, and lynched hated local tyrants. That same year, southwest of Suzhou, in the Jiangxi province porcelain-manufacturing city of Jingdezhen, thousands of workers rioted over low wages....One potter threw himself into a blazing kiln and perished to underline his fellows' plight....Instability in the urban world was matched by that in the countryside."

Like it or not, "the word will spread." What looked so wonderful in 1600 soon ended in 1644 when Jurchen tribesmen from across China's northern border, who called themselves Manchus, started their invasion and the task of winning the hearts of 120 million Chinese. What word are we spreading? What shape will our world take as we spread it?

A way to pray - holding a prized possession

- * Pick up any object that you prize highly
- * Gaze at it longingly and with fond affection
- * Remember who, when, why it became so close to you
- * Thank God for all these gifts,
- * ...so that (at least one of) The prosperous shall eat and worship.