

On Thanksgiving weekend I believe one expression of thankfulness to God is living an intentionally faith filled life. The Apostle Paul might call it “faithful libatious living.”

“As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation and the time of my departure has come.”

These words written from the apostle Paul spoke loud and clear to the readers of the second letter to Timothy in the first century but they need a little translation for us. When we speak of libations today we most often are referring to alcoholic drinks. From that perspective this passage would translate into saying that Paul was a strong drink. Well, he was strong as he lived his life with passion as he poured forth the words of God’s saving grace through Jesus Christ. Yet, libation can also be translated as offering or sacrifice. St. Paul certainly offered his life up in a sacrificial manner so the good news of Jesus Christ might move beyond the confines of Israel to Turkey, Greece, Italy, and beyond. Libation understood as sacrifice makes great sense in the case of St. Paul because his reward for spreading the gospel was oftentimes being arrested and imprisoned. Finally he was put to death as a Christian martyr.

The readers of the second letter to Timothy clearly understood that Paul’s “libatious” life put him in good standings before God. Paul fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith. Saint Paul’s life was a libation for God. How can our lives be a poured out as sacrificial libations for God our loving Creator, compassionate Redeemer, and ever present Sustainer? That is a question I would like us to reflect on as we explore the a few passages of scripture together.

I have selected an Old Testament passage, the words of Paul to Timothy and a passage from Luke that give us clues for faithful ‘libatious’ living. Joel gives us the clue of spirit filled visions. The letter lesson let’s know of strength that comes from God. Finally, our gospel lesson points out how humility is a key.

- I. Vision from God—Joel
- II. Strength from God—II Timothy
- III. Humility before God—Luke

Joel 2:23-29

²³ O children of Zion, be glad
and rejoice in the Lord your God;
for he has given the early rain for your vindication,
he has poured down for you abundant rain,
the early and the later rain, as before.

²⁴ The threshing floors shall be full of grain,
the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.

²⁵ I will repay you for the years
that the swarming locust has eaten,
the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter,
my great army, which I sent against you.

²⁶ You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied,
and praise the name of the Lord your God,
who has dealt wondrously with you.

And my people shall never again be put to shame.

²⁷ You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel,
and that I, the Lord, am your God and there is no other.
And my people shall never again be put to shame.

²⁸ Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.

²⁹ Even on the male and female slaves,
in those days, I will pour out my spirit.

The prophet Joel, writing about 400-500 years before the time of Jesus, was speaking from an ancient theological perspective that doesn't match the general thought process we maintain today. The book of Joel is three chapters in length.

The prophet had watched swarm after swarm of locust cover the land and wipe out the crops. He attributes this to divine punishment for the sins of the people. No doubt there were swarms of locust. Joel was probably right about the people sinning. But I would suggest the connection between the swarming and the sinning was a coincidence and not divine retribution. The God we know as revealed in Jesus of Nazareth does not send droughts or locust upon us but works through means of grace. Droughts and locust are natural phenomenon that agricultural developments help us control, more or less, with irrigation and chemical sprays today.

In addition, Joel sees the return of rain as a foreshadowing of the final days where God will judge the nations of the world and richly bless Israel for eternity. This is also an ancient perspective that views God as being nationalistic and we have come to understand God as the cosmic force of love with a universal nature.

I have some theological differences with Joel. Yet, I do see that in the midst of all of his ancient perspectives he does lift up an ongoing truth in verse 28 of chapter 2.

“I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old shall dream dreams, and your young shall see visions.”

God places a vision before us so we can create a more just, compassionate and sustainable world. That insight of Joel is right on the mark. Faithful living or what I would like to call ‘libationous’ living is life lived with divine insights. The vision of God is revealed to us in life, ministry, teachings, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

Joel alerts us to “vision from God” and in Paul’s writing to Timothy indicates the “strength” that is available from God.

II Timothy 4:6-8

⁶ As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Paul endured many hardships as he shared the good news of Jesus. He was oftentimes arrested and imprisoned in the midst of preaching the gospel. Yet, Paul’s understanding of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus enabled him to see that goodness can come from bad circumstances. This understanding filled Paul with power at all times. Perceiving hope in any and all circumstances can provide us with strength that moves us through life’s difficulties.

Several years ago a teacher assigned to visit children in a large city hospital received a routine call requesting that she visit a particular child. She took the boy’s name and room number. She was told by the teacher on the other end of the line, “We’re studying nouns and adverbs in his class now. I’d be grateful if you could help him with his homework so he doesn’t fall behind the others.” It wasn’t until the visiting teacher got outside the boy’s room that she realized it was located in the hospital’s burn unit. No one had prepared her to

find a young boy horribly burned and in great pain. She felt that she couldn't just turn and walk out, so she awkwardly stammered, "I'm the hospital teacher and your teacher sent me to help you with nouns and adverbs."

The next morning a nurse on the burn unit asked her, "What did you do to that boy?" Before she could finish a profusion of apologies, the nurse interrupted her, "You don't understand. We've been very worried about him but ever since you were here yesterday his whole attitude has changed. He fighting back and responding to treatment...it's as though he's decided to live." After weeks of recovery the boy was strong enough to explain what happened. He said he had completely given up hope until he saw that teacher. It all changed when he came to a simple realization. With joyful tears he expressed it this way, "They wouldn't send a teacher to work on nouns and adverbs with a dying boy, would they?"

Strength comes from hope and hope comes from God mysteriously working in and through us. This is the insight that Paul urges us to grasp.

Faithful living includes vision and strength from God. A variety of other aspects of faithful living could be listed but let me conclude by noting that humility is a key to faithful 'libatious' living. Jesus notes repeatedly that humility is pleasing in the sight of God. Please hear the reference to humility in a parable shared by Jesus.

Luke 18:9-14

⁹ He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: ¹⁰ "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' ¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."

I would suggest that humility is not only an expression of faithfulness but it is very practical as well. Its practicality can be seen in this old tale.

Remember the story about the frog that wanted to spend the winter in Florida but had no means of quick transportation? As the frog thought it through he remembered he had some friends in the goose family that were well equipped for the flight. So he devised a plan. He got a long rope and had his goose buddies each hold one end of the rope in their beaks. Then he held on to the middle of the rope tightly with his strong jaws and away they went. It worked and was a pleasant flight—the only way to fly! Then a spectator on the ground looked up and saw this strange sight and said, "My goodness, whoever invented that?" The frog, unable to restrain the impulse to take credit, opened his mouth and said, "I did." Moral of the story, "Pride goeth before the fall."

Humility serves us in some very practical ways. In addition, it can lead us to a faithful attitude towards our life and God's creation. We don't know who wrote this bit of verse but whoever did sure hit the nail on the head.

I love to watch the rooster crow,
he's like so many men I know,
Who brag and bluster, rant and shout,
and beat their manly chest
without the first darn thing to brag about.

It is reminiscent of that old story about the Chanticleer the rooster. This bird was a vain sort who prided himself on his accomplishments much like the Pharisee in the story in our gospel lesson. Most of all,

Chanticleer the Rooster congratulated himself on the sunrise. For as anyone could observe, his crowing each morning caused the sun to appear on the horizon. Invariably, this was so.

One morning, however, Chanticleer's alarm didn't go off and he overslept. When he awoke he was surprised and chagrined. There was the sun, high in the sky, and it had gotten there without one bit of help from him. Thinking things over, this rooster realized that he could not honestly take credit for the beauty of each day. But there was something else he could do. Said, Chanticleer, "If by my crowing I cannot bring in the dawn, then by my crowing I can celebrate its coming." Humility does not take the joy from life but it shifts the focus of the celebration to the proper source.

Vision, strength, and humility are traits found in each of us as we attempt to live life faithfully, that is, 'libatiously.' Now that's an expression of thankfulness.