His Vets

Guess what? If I live to be a hundred years old, my birthday will fall on Easter!

Easter was last month. It’s my favorite holiday of the year because we celebrate the victory of Jesus over sin and death. We celebrate new life, resurrection life! Now everything else makes sense—all of history worked toward the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But this Easter season was different—on Crucifixion Friday we didn’t gather in darkened buildings, blowing out candles and leaving in somber silence. Nor on Easter Sunday did we light candles and greet the sunrise in joyful congregation to rejoice in the resurrection.

In southwest Ethiopia we remember waking up in the pre-dawn darkness to the sound of Bunna believers joyfully singing at the top of their lungs, walking slowly along dirt trails to eventually reach that little church. We’d go out in the cool air and join the joyful procession—what excitement! He is risen!! We’d gather and sing and sing until late morning.

Afterward, Bunna believers would visit each other’s huts to share a half-gourd of Boona Gellebba, a tea made by boiling coffee bean husks. We’d get invited too!

But for Easter 2020, this historic viral pandemic meant social distancing. Without church or family gatherings, even so, Jesus is everywhere present. He will never leave us nor forsake us—we are not alone or forgotten.

After visiting house churches in other countries and living some years under communism, I’m pretty sure that one-day persecution will force church congregations underground into small home groups—and I firmly believe we should be getting ready for that now! But I wonder—could it be that this pandemic is a dress rehearsal? Could it be that the Lord is getting us ready? May we learn well! He will be with us to the end.

Think about it: the Gospel of Matthew begins with All this took place to fulfill
what the Lord had said through the prophet, ‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel, which means, God with us.’

And Matthew ends with the same message, as Jesus said, “Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

But if God is everywhere present, how can we be separated from Him? Back in 1983, before podcasts or CDs, I listened to sermons sent by snail mail on cassette tapes. Pastor Ian Thomas used the example of a light bulb. If you put a little piece of paper in a light socket and screw in the bulb—it doesn’t turn on. It is separated from the electricity; the current is right there—just no connection. When the contacts are clean, electrical power makes the bulb shine.

That was when I memorized Isaiah 59: 1-2. “Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor His ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you so that He will not hear.” He’s right there, just no connection.

Recently I was thinking again about Revelations 3:20. “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me.”

I love that picture! He’s right there. He’s not walking away in disgust, abandoning us in our darkness. But He’s also not kicking down the door, forcing Himself on us. He’s just patiently, gently inviting—and for those who repent and open the door, He does life with them. There’s nothing better, ever, than being with Jesus.

Suppose you were seriously disabled like this woman in southwestern Ethiopia. (Thank you Sharon for sharing this story!) She’s been mocked her whole life, lives in a male-dominant culture and persecuted for leaving her “father’s ways” when she opened the door of her heart to Jesus.

But the Lord is with her. Last year she graduated from training as one of 49 Bible-storying evangelists, and by then, she’d already planted 2 churches! Her class had people from 8 different “enemy” tribes, who learned love and respect each other now as the family of God.

Only new life in the resurrected Lord can do that!

But what about you and me? If life-long disability didn’t hold her back and the One who conquered death is with us even to the end of the age, what is holding us back from joyfully serving Him with all our heart and all our soul and all our strength and all our minds?

Inspired to press on, Fred & Vicki

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