

“Only God Saves Me”

When I was a kid, about 5th or 6th grade, I took several road trips with my dad. In many ways they are the highlights of my youth. I had my dad to myself for a week at a time. He was nearly deaf at that point so we did not talk much as we drove, but just being invited to be with him was great.

As part of those trips which were business for him we took side journeys to visit the Statue of Liberty and the Capitol building in Washington DC. I remember being awed by both. Each in its own way is a monument to liberty and the American Experiment. Inside the Statue of Liberty I saw the engineering feat of its construction as we climbed the narrow stairway to the observation deck. Being inside the Capitol building is different.

The Capitol building is grand. There are marble floors, paintings of historic events, and statues of great leaders of our country. The Capitol is built to inspire awe just as cathedrals are. It is both the People’s House and a cathedral to democracy. I walked the footsteps of James Madison, Daniel Webster, Hiram Revels, Margaret Chase Smith, Everett Dirksen, John Kennedy and lesser-known representatives of the people. This was where issues great and small were debated.

I could never have imagined that Americans would storm the Capitol as happened this past Wednesday. The young boy from 1967 still thought that the halls of Congress were sacrosanct. That little boy got one of his last naïve beliefs shattered on Wednesday. On the Day of the Epiphany a glaring, white light broke through a shattered belief. Rather than revealing the Light of the World as was revealed to the Magi 2,000 years ago, it was the darkness within the human soul that was revealed. It is a darkness that resides in all of us, sinner and saint. It is part of the human condition that has plagued us since The Fall in the Garden of Eden.

In my sadness I have prayed. I have also wondered what there is to do about this darkness that afflicts each of us. I asked God if there was an action I should take. Indeed, how as a man of faith I am to respond to the events and to my own sense of loss. God’s response came slowly and surreptitiously in the form of a song. Specifically, The First Song of Isaiah as set to the hymn tune, *Thomas Merton*. It snuck up on me and just started rolling around in my head. I was not sure why until I started to sing it out loud.

“Surely it is God who saves me;  
trusting him I shall not fear.  
For the Lord defends and shields me,  
and his saving help his near.  
So rejoice as you draw water  
from salvation’s living spring;  
in the day of your deliverance  
thank the Lord, his mercies sing.”<sup>1</sup>

I had my answer. My sadness at the desecration of living monument to our history, aspirations and hopes was salved by remembering that human monuments and ideals are but faint attempts at bringing the Kingdom of God into the world. These efforts are not in vain for they are our endeavors to fulfill our inborn aspirations to a

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<sup>1</sup> Hymn 679, The Hymnal 1982

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higher plane; a plane where we realize that God's love is our only saving grace. It is the plane where we shed our egos and delusions of self-importance. It is the plane where of our self-emptying (kenosis as the theologians call it) gives God in Christ the room to live and breathe within us. It is the plane where we are reunited with our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. It is where we go from God With Us to God Within Us.

As surely as I was lifted up and encouraged by the first verse of this hymn, the second verse answered the question of what to do.

“Make his deeds known to the peoples;  
tell out his exalted name.  
Praise the Lord, who has done great things;  
all his works, his might proclaim.  
Zion, lift your voice in singing;  
for with you has come to dwell,  
in your very midst,  
the great and Holy One of Israel.”<sup>2</sup>

This second verse reminds us that while it is good to have faith in the saving help of the Lord, our job goes beyond having faith to sharing that faith with others. We must “make his deeds known to” all people. We are to be evangelists for God not some political party or economic system. As much as it may pain us to recognize it, Jesus is neither Republican nor Democrat; he is neither conservative nor liberal, and neither capitalist nor socialist. Jesus is above all of those labels and beyond the limits of our political concepts. Jesus is the representative of God. He calls us to align ourselves with the God whose preference is for the poor, oppressed, widowed and orphaned. The God of Zion is the savior of the downtrodden.

The boy within me lost an ideal this week as a result of the storming of the Capitol building, but he also gained a deeper understanding of where his faith must lie. Only God will save me and you. Let us remember that and “lift our voices in singing” to God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who dwells with us and within us and whose temple is not a grand building but the human heart.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.