

The Good Old Days

*Do not say, "Why were the former days better than these?"
For it is not from wisdom that you ask this. Ecclesiastes 7:10*

"Amy told me the other day that she's more afraid of heights now than she used to be," my friend Bob shared a phenomenon that we both had already experienced several times that day. The final push toward the peak of Lilly Mountain in Colorado involves climbing over some boulders—some with precarious slopes. I've got to admit that I was tensed up pretty tight over a couple of them. By the time Bob mentioned a fear of heights, we were on our way down the mountain (with peak hiking, you're only half-way to the end when you reach the summit). For me, going down a precipice seems to amplify that fear of heights, because now I am looking at the ground below.

"Maybe it's just that we are just more careful," I said, "But In Ecclesiastes, Solomon describes getting older and says that the 'fear of heights' will come to us (Ecc 12:5). So I guess we are getting old rather than careful." After a bit of discussion about Solomon, Bob declared, "I'm going to read Ecclesiastes." "Read with caution," I warned, "Solomon was searching for the purpose of life, and he never really found it. The fact that we all die—rich and poor, king and slave, wise and fool, everybody comes to the same fate—this fact rendered all pursuits in life meaningless to Solomon. So, it can be a depressing read if you aren't prepared for that."

Somewhat inspired, I decided to read Ecclesiastes again myself. I rediscovered the wisdom of Solomon in this short book. You can read it through in a single sitting. Well, that's true until you get caught up in the nuggets of wisdom that are embedded in Solomon's quest to know the purpose of life. After all, he was the wisest man ever. One verse that stopped me in my tracks was this: *Do not say, "Why were the former days better than these?" For it is not from wisdom that you ask this. (Ecc 7:10).*

In Colorado I spent a good deal of time in my hammock, gazing at the mountains and living in the memories of a simpler time—one without Covid, racism revolution, internet, shutdowns, face masks, and on, and on.... Solomon's words sent a twinge of conviction into my soul. Don't get me wrong—it is good to get away from all the hubbub of the world and relax for a bit. It's even alright to wax nostalgic every once in a while. But, if we live in memories, we are absent from the present. If we are pining for the past, we deny our faith in the future.

It's not that our memories aren't good. I think it is profound that Solomon does not say that the good old days weren't good. He seems to allow for the possibility that the past days were indeed "better than these". In fact, the wisdom literature in the Bible (Ecclesiastes, Job, and Proverbs) came to be held as scripture (inspired and authoritative) among the Jews during their exile in Babylon. Wisdom was embraced as the people tried to make sense of the absence of God in their daily lives. In spite of contemporary struggles, Solomon tells people that God holds the future, and God can be trusted. One theme that resounds in the conclusion of Solomon's book of Ecclesiastes is that God is large and in charge.

Eventually, we made it back to the truck, safe and sound—Yaay! I guess that we weren't so old as to get stuck on the mountain. That's the good thing about mountain hiking—keep trudging, putting one foot in front of the other, and you will make it home. Life can be that way too. If it seems like we are struggling up steep grades, or perhaps teeth clenched and slipping down, trust that God holds the future and that there is a place for us there. Keep moving in faith and we will make it home.

There is one thing more—something most important. Recall Solomon was stumped by one thing that, for him, made all things meaningless—death. But for us, death is defeated! We have Jesus Christ! Now everything we do has profound meaning and potential. Let's keep this in mind as we move into the future, trusting God for tomorrow.

I suppose I should tell you that when we got to the truck...the battery was dead. After a jump, we were on our way again. There's probably a sermon in there somewhere....

Be the church, --pastor tony