

THE LOVING ARMS OF GOD Isa 49:1-7; I Cor 1:1-9 Jn 1:29-41

Marion Bend West published in GUIPEPOSTS a while back ^A
a story entitled "The Loving Arms of God". Her husband was
undergoing radiation treatment for a brain tumor. Being treated
at the same hospital was a frail elderly lady who did not ~~be~~
^{believe}
~~live~~ in God. Mrs. West felt moved to tell this lady, named
Thelma, of God's love. Later God led her to offer Thelma a
gift - a shawl. When she gave it she said: "It's not from me.
It's from God. Now it may look like a shawl but it's not...It's
the arms of God, holding you and loving you".

The rest of the story tells of the transformation that took
place in Thelma's life when she came to the realization that
each time she touched the shawl that she was in the loving arms
of God.

Let us be reminded that we are always in the loving ^{arms}
~~arms~~
of God. We know what it means to be in the arms of another
person who loves us. We know the security, the ~~w~~ warmth, the joy.
Can you visualize the loving arms of God around you this ~~morning~~
^{morning?}

Some people cannot. I heard about an officer in a police
helicopter who spotted a car speeding down the Interstate. He
radioed his partner ~~on~~ ^{on} the ground and the partner stopped the
speeder and began ~~writing~~ ^{writing} a citation. "How in the world did
you know I was speeding" the man asked. The patrolman didn't
say anything, merely pointed to the sky. And the man moaned,
"Do you mean to tell me that he's turned against me too".

2
I would guess that there are persons here this morning who are not certain that God loves them. We do face a hostile universe that makes us ill, causes us to age, and eventually to die. How do we hold on to ~~faith~~^{faith} in a world that often batters us?

I Corinthians 1:1-9

Both Isaiah and Paul in I Cor. remind us that God is faithful. How can we bring God's faithfulness to life in human ~~terms~~^{terms.}

1. First of all could we not say that God ~~never~~^{never} turns his back on us. I wish that were so in human relationships. "For better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish..." How wonderful it would be if husbands and wives never turned their backs on one another.

~~How~~^{How} great it would be if parents and children never turned ~~their~~^{their} backs on one another. Human love is imperfect. But not God's love. He does not forsake us or forget us, I heard about a salesman who had been working in Texas and was transferred to California. The move was talked about in the home for ~~several~~^{several} weeks. The night before the move his five year old daughter was overheard in her prayers: "And now, God, I'll have to say Goodbye forever because tomorrow we are moving to California".

She will, of course, discover that God is alive and well in California. He never forgets nor forsakes us.

Even when life is ~~cruel~~^{cruel}, God is there. A new biography of Carrie Ten Beem recently was published. A reviewer noted:

This biography traces her life from her parents Christ-

centered ~~home~~ ^{home} and influences thru the twilight years when her

faith grew greatest despite physical suffering. as a young woman he ministered to homeless~~s~~ feebleminded individuals and the Dutch Girl Guides. In Corrie, we see a person often faced with indomitable circumstances, yet who always knew her God was bigger. She handled cruelty and suffering with forgiveness and hope even in the concentration camps and the famed "hiding place" of Jewish people in Holland during WWII. She had a amazing way of turning any circumstance into A positive lesson from God. As she said in prison, "We are ~~God's~~ ^{God's} training school and learning much".

God's merry saint, as she is known, knew even in the horror and degradation of the concentration camps, that God had not forsaken her nor forgotten her. God is faithful. He does not turn his back on us.

2. Then God is there when we need a friend. Everyone ~~needs~~ ^{needs} a friend. One of the blessings of a Good marriage is when the couple can say of the spouse "he or she is my best friend" The faithfulness of God means that he not only ~~does~~ ^{does} not turn his back on us but that he is the best friend we can have.

Now this does ~~not~~ ^{not} mean that God is someone who will solve all our problems for us. It is said that one time Joe Garagiolo stepped up to the plate. Before assuming his stance, Joe, who as a faithful Catholic, made the sign of the cross in the dirt in front of the plate. Catcher Yogi Berra, also a devout Catholic, walked out and erased it and said to Joe "Let's let God watch this inning".

The desire to turn God ~~into~~ ^{into a} heavenly bellhop is a constant temptation Perhaps a better example of God's faithful-

ness as a friend in found in DDE CRUSADE IN EUROPE. American troops were advancing toward the Rhine expecting at any time to encounter the German army. Eisenhower writes: We joined some (of the troops) and found them...eager to finish the job. Nevertheless, as we walked along I fell in with one young soldier who seemed silent and depressed. "How are you feeling, son" I asked. "General" he said, "I'm awful nervous. I was wounded 2 months ago and just got back from the hospital yesterday. I don't feel so good" "Well" I said to him, "You and I are a good pair then, because I am nervous too...maybe if we just walk along together toward the river, we'll be good for each other". "Oh" said the soldier, "I meant I was nervous; I'm not anymore. I guess it is not so bad around here".

Just knowing that the general was walking with him gave him courage. God is a faithful companion who walks with us. He gives us the necessary resources to deal with life's ups and downs. As one man commented about the announcement of the 'death of God' thought of several years ago "It cannot be, I knew he is not dead. I just spoke to him this morning".

God never turns his back on us. He is there when we need a friend. And God's faithfulness means that we

3 can trust him in our hour of greatest need.

Joyce Landerf tells about a wife who became very very ill. She went into an extended coma. Her husband would sit by her bed, and when she would occasionally rouse a little she could look over and see him sitting near her. He didn't say anything, he was quiet, he was just there. Finally the coma broke, and her health gradually restored. But that woman said. "You know, I will always remember my husband sitting there in the chair every time I woke up. He was so tender. He was so quiet. He was

se present". Then she added, "Could it be that when God is silent, he is being tender with us?"

Like a tender loving father. That is how God is. One ^{pastor} ~~pastor~~ writes: "I can remember going with my parents to visit someone. We were small children, and when we drove home, we would lay ⁱⁿ ~~in~~ the back seat of the car and fall asleep. It never crossed our minds that we might not make it home. We never worried about whether ^{or} ~~or~~ not we were safe. For there was our father, right with us, and he would bring us home".

"In the same way, we can ^{trust} ~~trust~~ our heavenly father in both life and death. We can trust the words of Jesus who says, "Where I am, you shall be also. I will come and take you to myself" We can trust that ^{Christ} ~~Christ~~ will ^{bring} ~~bring~~ us home to our heavenly ~~Father~~. And with that kind of trust, our death is like children falling asleep in the back of the car. For we know where we are going".

The loving arms of God. The sad thing about many lives is that God will not be allowed to love. Someone has defined sin that way - the ^{refusal} ~~refusal~~ to let God love us.

Have you known anyone who would not let anyone get close to them. They may be fine people, but something in their lives keeps them from loving and being loved. Some people are like that with God. They shrink back. They will not let him embrace them in his arms.

CS Lewis writes: "Good things as well as bad, you know,

are caught by a kind of infection. If you ^{want} ~~want~~ to get warm you must stand near the fire; if you want to get wet you must get in the water; if you want joy, power, peace, eternal life you must get close to it, or even into the thing that has them. They are not a sort of prize which God could, if he chose, just hand to anyone. They are a great fountain of energy and beauty spurting up at the very center of reality. If you are close to it the spray will get you wet; if you are not, you will remain dry. Once a man is united to God, how could he not live forever? Once a man is separated from God, what can he do but wither and die"

The loving arms of God are waiting to embrace you and me this morning. Someone has ^{written} ~~written~~: "There is not enough darkness in all the world to put out the light of one little candle".

There is the one candle that you and I can light this day. God is faithful. He will never turn his back on us; he is always there as a friend; and we can trust him in our hour of great need.