

Leaves Of Hope #14

Family Devotion written by C.M. Gullerud

All creatures that have breath and motion,
That throngs the earth, the sea, and sky,
Now join me in my heart's devotion
Help me to raise his praises high,
My utmost powers can never aught
Declare the wonders of his might.

L.H. 30, Verse 4

Ecclesiastes 7: 2-4

It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure.

Mourning, sorrow, sadness of countenance – these are not of themselves signs of godliness. There was certainly nothing godly about the mourning that went through the camp of the Philistines when Goliath, their champion, fell in the valley of Elah. There was certainly nothing commendable about the sorrow of Potiphar's wife who grieved because she was not able to seduce Joseph, her slave. On the other hand

there is nothing in itself wrong or sinful when people laugh, are merry, and are filled with joy. Certainly the marriage at Cana was a joyful occasion with laughter, mirth, and general feasting. Nothing wrong with that! Had there been something wrong, Jesus would not have been there as a guest.

The contrast then of our text lies along other lines than just mourning versus feasting; sorrow versus laughter; sadness versus mirth. To point this up let us take a page from the record of the Prophet Daniel. In his day Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords. It was a feast where the wine flowed freely. There was much merriment and unseemly behavior among the men and women present. No thought was given to the Lord and God and his throne where they would have to give a final account. Rather, there was the most flagrant kind of scoffing and mocking at things sacred and holy. The feast was still under way when a hand appeared and wrote upon the plastered wall: **“Mene, Mene, tekel, upharsin”** (You are weighed in the scales and found lacking; your kingdom is over and done with.) In that night the gay and mirth-loving king was slain.

How many feasts and parties today resemble this frivolous king's banquet? Perhaps they do not go to the extreme of Belshazzar's feast; perhaps they have the veneer of respectability and yet are just as devoid of God and just as frivolous as was the banquet in Babylon. If we find ourselves in such company, where our Christianity must be checked at the door, we can be sure that this kind of mirth is not for us.

Now let us take a look at a gathering that took place 500 years later. The scene presents a house of mourning. It is the home of Mary and Martha, a home into which sorrow has entered. The occasion is the death of their beloved brother, Lazarus. But what we see in this house of mourning is much to be preferred to what we see in the worldliness of a house of laughter and revelry. Perhaps you see a few tears being shed and hear a few sobs. But in the midst of it all you hear words such as these: "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." You hear words of Jesus: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die." John 11:25-26 Now you hear the believer's response: "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world." You

see the conqueror over sin and death stepping to the door of the tomb saying; “Lazarus, come forth” and Lazarus comes forth. This is the kind of Lord we have. On the last day, all will me forth and arise, the believers to eternal life and the unbelievers to eternal death. Which do you prefer? - the merrymaking in Belshazzar’s palace or the house of mourning at Bethany? Our answer is found in our text: “It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting.”

Oh, enter his gates with thanksgiving and praise;

Glory be to God!

To bless him and thank him our voices we will raise;

Sing praise unto God out of Zion!

L.H. 44:3