#blessed

Kalamazoo Mennonite Fellowship

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Psalm 127, Mark 12:38-44

One of the things I love when looking at Scripture is when you find subversive ideas in what appear to be passages that support a kind of quietism and acceptance of the way things are.

One of those places is Psalm 127.

You can tell how important safety is to psalmist. And you can tell how male-dominated his thoughts are. What kind of children are the best kind to have? Sons, as soon as possible. As many as possible. Why? Because they are like weapons to attack the other men who are your enemies. Lots of sons are a “reward” from God.

Now, let’s be clear: it is great to have sons, and some people are blessed to have a “quiver full.” But you can sense the danger lurking in this verse: a support for oppression of men over other men; of men over children; of men over their sons (whose point is to protect the fathers); of men over their daughters (who are erased in this list of blessings.

But let’s watch the psalm get up and wrestle itself.

“Unless the Lord…” the psalm says. Unless the Lord build the house, unless the Lord guard the city, all of your hard work will be vain. You can spend your time and money and emotional health in “anxious toil,” but it will never be enough.

And unless the Lord build your family, all your effort at protecting yourself from your enemies will be for nothing. Do you see how this begins to dismantle all these human systems set up for safety and protection?

People read this psalm and say: God will give us the safety we *want* if we just acknowledge God. But how do we get God to do what we want: safety from our anxieties, attack, and our enemies. But really, God is only promising the safety we *need*.

So, if our city is attacked, or our house falls down, or we can’t have children, let alone sons, did *we* do something wrong? Well, to be honest, in some cases yes. But mostly, we are called to a radical dependence on God that may foolish for a long while, a radical dependence that may result in our ending up in places of failure and distress.

Here’s part of our story: Bess and I, in the vigor of our youth, went to serve God as self-supporting missionaries in Spain. We did this, I believe, out of faithfulness and dependence on God. And, after a frustrating year, we came home, our tails between our legs, defeated, failed.

This failure haunted me throughout my twenties and thirties and beyond, and some of those feelings of failures still linger. But you know, that time in Spain is so part of our *story* with God. It is part of the journey that brought us to have the children we have, the faith we have, even the friends we have.

So, I would not erase that time in our lives.

The real hero in our scripture is the “poor widow” in the gospel passage, who receives the praise of God. Unlike the rich people putting in their money, she is not a successful man with a quiver full of sons. But she, in her radical dependence on God, is our model. Putting yourself in the role of “a poor widow,” is not always a pleasant place to be!

Sometimes that calls us to walk alongside people who are like the poor widow. Sometimes that calls us to move towards poverty. Sometimes that calls us to new generosity in the middle of our current poverty.

I wonder what her example means to you?