

The February CFAMC Devotional Page

We begin this week with a much-shared, much-enjoyed quote from our beloved brother Greg Pascuzzi (preserved for the ages by our equally beloved brother Bill Vollinger):

"Frequently with artists and musicians you have arrogance coupled with an inferiority complex, rather than confidence coupled with humility."

Humility about ourselves and confidence in God ... yes, it is a tremendous paradox, because in our fallen state humility never comes easily, and confidence comes easily IF it is in ourselves OR someone we choose to admire (which is really confidence in ourselves twice removed, since we are then trusting our own judgment about the merits of someone else).

Never mind that reality is totally against us in our misplaced confidence in ourselves and our judgement. Never mind that our bodies would not even be the quintessence of dust if God, by His grace had not provided the one thing that -- temporarily, for few last more than 70 years, and nobody gets far past a century -- holds together the quintessence: God's breath of life. Never mind that even in our days of greatest strength and health, we are still prone at any time to sickness and accident that can very quickly render us completely incapable of doing what we need to do for ourselves, or end our life outright. And who among us has not yet been taken for a fool, tripped up in this judgment we like to trust so much?

[And, your author is getting a free lesson today, writing this page while in the grips of a migraine headache. Without the strength of God, I would be curled up in bed still, but God is able]

But, our tremendous capacity for delusion makes us prone to the paradox Greg Pascuzzi describes in the first half of his quote. Because we feel our own failings and cannot feel those of others, we simultaneously worry that others might be younger, stronger, older, more influential, BETTER than us, while at the same time assuring ourselves that no, we must be the most talented thing that ever hit the universe (Satan's old lie that we can be like God still finds fertile ground in our old nature). Arrogance plus chronic worries of inadequacy; most of the conflicts in world history boil down right there. And so do a lot of struggles between musicians in church and everywhere else.

This is the very point in which the Holy Spirit of God comes, if you will, to meet us once we belong to Him in Christ. God has known all along that we are delusional when we trust in ourselves and our judgment, and has some very plain things to say to us:

Psalm 118:8 -- It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man.

"Man" there means "mankind," so it is sometimes best applied if you repeat it while looking in the mirror! And, those of us in the United States have never known what it is to have "princes," but if there are no princes where you are, you just fill in your favorite political figure, celebrity, thinker, author, philosopher, preacher ...

Psalm 118:9 -- It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.

Proverbs 3:5-6

5. Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding.

6. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy path.

Now, the above Scriptures are easy to read and memorize; they are hard to live out. And sometimes, God has allowed whole groups of people to go through *forced humiliation* so that they might learn confidence in Him alone. Today is the last day of Black History Month, and, believe it or not, you might still meet people who know a little about this:

Cotton picking in Georgia, 1907 --- U.S. Library of Congress (Public Domain)



That picture was taken in 1907, 42 years after the end of the Civil War, 45 years after the Emancipation Proclamation. What you see there is sharecropping, which, along with Jim Crow laws, lynchings, and other routine humiliations, persisted into the 1960s. There are still many not-so-old African Americans living who grew up living that picture that you see, many of whom are my relatives and close friends.

As a Christian musician, however, I see that God gave to my people, and to the world, a great gift in revealing Himself to my ancestors in their forced humiliation, for they responded appropriately, as testified by their now-famous songs:

"There is a Balm in Gilead, to make the wounded whole.
There is a Balm in Gilead, to heal the sin-sick soul.

Sometimes I feel discouraged, and think my work's in vain,
But then the Holy Spirit revives my soul again.

There is a Balm in Gilead, to make the wounded whole.
There is a Balm in Gilead, to heal the sin-sick soul.

If you can preach like Peter, if you can pray like Paul,
Then tell the world of Jesus, Who died to save us all.

There is a Balm in Gilead, to make the wounded whole.
There is a Balm in Gilead, to heal the sin-sick soul."

And, for you folks looking for Easter songs...

"He rose! He rose! He rose from the grave!
He rose! He rose! He rose from the grave!
He rose! He rose! He rose from the grave!
And the Lord shall bear my spirit home!"

And for those of you going through the storms of life...

"I been in the storm so long,
I been in the storm so long, children,
I been in the storm so long, oh,
Give me little time to pray.

When I get to Heaven, I will sing and shout,
Oh, give me little time to pray!
There'll be nobody there to turn me out,
Oh, give me little time to pray!"

"We are climbing Jacob's ladder,

We are climbing Jacob's ladder,
We are climbing Jacob's ladder,
Soldiers of the cross!"

There are hundreds more examples possible; that is a small selection from my favorites. Bill Vollinger and I have had a few interesting conversations about the "Sorrow Songs" and the mindset thereof, and that has spurred me to look and see that there is more in those songs than W.E.B. Dubois, who coined the term "Sorrow Songs," could see. Mr. Dubois was not a Christian; thus, the Spirit did not show to him the confidence in the Lord in every area of their lives that African Americans developed despite whole centuries of forced humiliation.

Confidence in the Lord is NEVER in vain. I am living testimony to the fact that the faith of the slaves and their sharecropping descendants in God was not worthless, for God is a great, powerful, merciful God: I can read, write, and have attained the position of Devotional Leader for an organization no less important than CFAMC. I also own the laptop I am writing this page on, and I live in the house my family owns in San Francisco, where I run my own growing business. Only the eye of faith could have foreseen this from my own family's recent past, much less slavery days. When I say poor, we were POOR. And I say again: confidence in the Lord is NEVER in vain.

As a young African American woman, one of the things that concerns me as I look around on my people is that while the forced humiliation of African Americans is largely over, we are also seem to be losing our confidence in God. But, as I have attained my 30th year and continued my study of my people's history, I have also come to realize that the picture of universal fealty to God in the past is just that -- a picture. You see, even in slavery days, there was a difference between forced humiliation and *actual* humility -- even then, personal humility was a transaction made between the individual's heart and God in Christ by the Holy Spirit, all though some circumstances were more conducive than others. The same holds true for us today, no matter one's race or circumstance.

When we choose to trust in God and humble ourselves under His care, we get to walk through life, no matter what happens, with this confidence.

Psalm 23:1 -- The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.

Romans 8:28 -- And we know [not believe, but KNOW] that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.

I can tell you that living out those two verses is a much more reasonable way to live than trying to live as though I was the source of all my power, my strength, and my care. God lets me have a migraine every now and then just to remind me ... but by His power, this Devotional Page is now just about finished, even on a day when I ordinarily could barely make it out of bed! He is worthy of our trust and hope and confidence, no matter the circumstance -- let's go forth into the remaining 5/6 of the year with that confidence in Him, and let Him work His plan through us!