

Enough for today...
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I grew up around playgrounds, usually close by to the public schools in my neighborhood in the Bronx. Memories play tricks on me, but I have a vague recollection of the school – PS 16, I think, and the worn grass field where the playground was located. I remember the playthings:

- There was a rotating thing, a spinner of some kind that you held onto with one hand and foot, while the other foot moved ever faster, much like you would on a scooter, except going in a circle. Then when you had reached optimum speed, you would jump on, enjoy the ride, until it slowed and it was time to do it all over again!
- The Monkey Bars: how I loved the monkey bars: hanging upside-down, squeezing through the metal cubes formed by the pipes, climbing, leaping, and falling...
- The Swings: Everyone wanted to swing & they were hard to get to, especially once you graduated from the wooded, cradle like facsimiles of the real thing, with the wooden bar that was slid down over you to make sure the fun part of falling was eliminated from the equation!

When we did get to the big ones, we would swing and swing, higher, faster, sometimes lifting the whole swing structure right out of the ground with us. Eventually, we would lose momentum of swing imbalanced, careening sideways into one another – only to start all over again.

- The see-saw: actually the ride or game I least enjoyed. It never seemed to make sense to me. Too heavy or too light, one end always up or the other always down – or on our way to up and down. It never went fast enough, never seemed to do anything, except when we played a little rough and would try to thrust the other person off with a hard landing or unsuspecting lift! I never got the idea of “see” – “saw” until years later.

All in all, it was a time of play in the midst of much of the life of the time that is at best distant to the memory. While the swings and monkey bars, the slides, and the spinners were left in the playground long ago, the see-saw has always stayed

with me. The one ride I really didn't like seems to be the one that has most paralleled my life.

Just as one side of the see-saw might have too much or too little weight, producing unseen outcomes, it has been something of the story of this life: too much of this, not enough of that, trying to get more of this, less of that...

Actually, I think that the "see-saw" was invented by historians, because it seems to be the unwritten tempo of all of human endeavors. This morning for example...

We begin with the first testament, in the second book of the Hebrew Bible, the *Nevi'im* or Prophets. We are in the latter section of the Prophet Isaiah, also referred to as the Deutero-Isaiah – the supposed second of three writers of this Book. It is a time following the destruction of the temple in 586 BCE. The Hebrews have lost everything outward that identified them as God's chosen people. Over a long period of captivity, holding on as best they could while under Babylonian control, they return to Zion, Jerusalem, to find little recognizable remaining. The glory days are not much more than rubble and clouds.

The "saw" side of the "see." The inner strength, the holding onto the belief that one day they would return and recapture what they remember is now dashed by the harsh reality. Nothing remains, and like a stopper pulled from a drain, their hopes, dreams, and energy begins to slip away...

But the prophet Isaiah is there. He reminds the nation who they are, how they have been chosen by God, that they are a covenant people, and not to lose hope of faith. "Come out of your darkness! Do you think God will forget you? Does a mother forget her nursing child?" Come out of your darkness, there is enough in you to see this through...

And, they do, of course, because that is what we do. We come out of darkness eventually, whether because of fading memories of what put us there, burning faith that draws us forward, anger, even, determination...hope...

Simply God is with you even in the very darkest of days.

And so as I began to think about these things in preparing for today, I had two images in my mind, both from pictures during the week, both from the New York Times.

One was of an Iraqi military person, cleaning up at the end of the day under an outdoor shower. In his shorts, he was bathed in water, rinsing himself off like I do each morning in my own shower. Behind him were twenty foot high blocks of reinforced concrete, resembling more of a construction site than an embattlement. Instead of being chaotic and under fire, it seemed almost normal and natural. And I thought how one could get used to living in such a place, such

a surrounding, such a condition – just like getting up each day and going work; except your work is going to war. Outside those barriers, people were losing everything, up to and including their lives – and like the Hebrews of old, someone – something was driving them on. Freedom? God? Determination? Self-preservation...

I have no idea what it is like to take a shower in the middle of a war.

The second photo was more troubling, if only because it was more overtly graphic. Up until a few weeks ago, I had never heard of the Irrawaddy Delta, let alone Myanmar. With many others, I have been swept into the devastation of the cyclone, and the hard-to-fathom refusal for the military junta and Than Shwe the leader to allow foreign humanitarian aid to the victims. That seems to be happening – maybe.

But the picture. In the still flooded delta, a lone Myanese man was poling his small boat through the waters. With hardly a look, he poled past the barley submerged body of a human, looking more like the underside of a dead and floating crab, recognizable only by its form. The barely noticed body was certainly the result stultification that sets in the human psyche protecting itself from so much of an overload of shocking, intensive, unrelenting conditions.

I have never poled past a dead body as though it were just a dead and floating crab.

God is supposed to stop these things, or so myths have taught us to believe. If you are not a sinner no such things are supposed to befall you, so if they do... well,

Yet, last week's reading of Job addressed this. Cyclones and wars are not punishments of God. One is nature and the other, perhaps, a lack of nurture...but not the vendetta or response of God.

In some ways the Babylonian captivity, the return to Jerusalem, the rebuilding, and even the destruction of the temple again in the first century in 70 CE ending the Jewish Revolt in 66 CE – these are so far away, and so much has transpired, and life and the world has gone on, that the ancient horror and devastation of such violence is easier to process through the lens of time and distance...

But these things in our time, like in the times of those living in the past, these daily occurrences have a way of moving us into an awkward sense of normalcy, tinged more or less with something of survivor's guilt. Still, we easily forget.

When we do remember, we search for meaning in our own lives, especially when we find that such powerful events surround us and those we love and know. We all have lived through upheavals, the up and downs, the too much or the "no

good” and not enough of the “good.” We struggle through enormous changes, loss of loved ones, employment, illnesses, addictions, a sense of malaise, difficulties in bringing our own lives into perspective...

The weird and strange juxtaposition of power and privilege: lying on a sunlit beach contemplating these words, while others shower in cement cubicles, or navigate rivers of destruction...is not lost on me. Frankly, it's weird. This week's Midnight Run...

“See-saw” Too much, too little, in the middle again...

All this brings me to Matthew's words of this morning. I spent a lot of time the last few days trying to imagine or meditate myself to the point where I had nothing except me standing in the presence of God. I imagined the cyclone literally ending its destruction at my feet, with inches of sand behind me and nothing remaining in front when the winds and the water ceased. Nothing.

And then I thought of Matthew's rendition of Jesus' words: Therefore do not worry about your life, what you will eat, what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is life not more than food and the body more than clothing?...Your God knows that you need all these things; strive first for God and these things will be provided.”

Well, thankfully but not unscathed, most of us will not experience what it is to lose everything and be suddenly thrust into the presence of God in ways that are powerful and as defining as possible as a human to answer the ultimate question: “Who do **you** say I am?”

Yet, all of us know that in a deep and abiding way, however we know God, that Jesus' words as a prophet are true.

The measure of abundance on the outside in visible ways and the measure of abundance that resides in faith in invisible ways – have always been my “see-saw.” And maybe yours. When I let go of the weight of things that hold me down, I have enough to lift me up. When I hold on to the worries and the weights, I am held down by not enough to raise me.

There is much to be said for prayer and meditation; however you may know it, in riddling through the playground of life, moving off the arc of the swing or the spin of the merry-go-round, or the short one-time thrill of the climb for the slide...

And there is much to be said about these two prophets of this morning: Isaiah and the Christ Jesus and their exhortations to take care of the deep and inner relationships we have with God first, and then come to the world from there, from the light and lighted place of unweighted faith in God.

In our daily lives, this relationship with God, whatever it is – is enough for today – to be available and of use to others' in God's name as those who trust in God, even as lost as we sometimes may be. It was enough in ancient times, the time of Jesus, the time of war, natural disasters, or the midnight streets of New York.

It is all rooted in that relationship. From there, we all find our way, gratefully with one another and touched by places like this.

And, on this day, as we remember those who serve today and have served before in the armed forces, let us pray for them in gratitude for their sacrifices and in earnest for their return. But first let us pray that in their lives, under whatever the conditions, they walk with a God of their understanding. For like us, at the end of this day, that will be enough. Everything else will be a bonus.

Amen.