

“Great is Thy Faithfulness” is now a favorite hymn in most Christian congregations, for good reasons ... not only for its rousing singable chorus, but for the important lyrics from Hebrew Scripture: “Morning by morning new mercies (we) see!” The Jewish people were constantly remembering the way their God helped them in the past, especially in their Exodus from being slaves in Egypt. The Jewish Passover in Springtime remembers this liberation; the Jews were instructed to *remember* every year this amazing salvation by God, to never forget what God has done for them, (which then gives hope and faith that God is still actively with them in the present and in the future!)

Similarly, Christians make the practice of *remembering* wondrous things that Jesus did, which gives faith that his Spirit is still actively with us. Things of the past can act as **signs** which then give hope for the future. *As the Spirit has comforted, helped, and liberated in the past, so the Spirit will be with us also in the future!* We remember his life-giving sacrifice in the Last Supper, for example. It's a memorial meal that by its re-enactment renews our experience of his forgiving grace, his loving mercies. There are many examples in the Bible, both Jewish and Christian, of memories that act as **signs of God's presence, which are then also promises for God being with us in the future!** Just to mention a few... there is the famous sign of the rainbow after the flood, which makes us *remember* that God will ultimately show mercy to this world. There is the story of Joseph, a sign of God's presence and power: to raise Joseph to be a ruler in Egypt, who then showed amazing grace/forgiveness to his brothers who had left him in a pit to die. We can be raised against all odds, and we can show grace/forgiveness to those who have hurt us. There is the sign of Jesus washing the feet of his followers, so that his servant spirit would

carry on in their lives and our lives. All the diverse ways that Jesus healed in the past are signs to us of divine healing presence that still exists, in the present and future.

While I like and have learned many of the meditation practices from the East, one thing does bother me, and I hope that it is a distortion made by very few. The good emphasis on *present moment awareness* can lead to an undervaluing or even dismissal of the past and the future. I have heard it in a cute slogan, "The past is history, tomorrow's a mystery, but the present is a gift." Surely it is true that we don't want the negativities of being bound by the past or being overly anxious about the future. But just as surely we need the positive things about the past and future to help us live in the present, to greet each morning confident of "new mercies" we will see.

We need the past to teach us lessons about things we do not wish to repeat, and to remind us of things that show us the deliverance of God's Spirit. We need to *remember* the lessons that history can teach and *remember* the blessings of God that have been there for us. It must be said that in our present day, we need to remember the lessons of war and peace. As with most followers of Jesus and the Bible, I do lean heavily on the side of making peace, war only as a last, last resort. I always loved the Christian folk song we sang in college: "Gonna lay down my sword and shield, down by the riverside! I ain't gonna study war no more." Yes, the Hebrew prophets said "not by might and power, but by every word of God." (Yes, the truth is perhaps the biggest sword.)

But because of current news, I did pick up a magazine on Military History the other day, to see if there were any lessons that might be relevant for us. Amidst the pages about types of weapons and armored vehicles, I did learn a few things. There were apparently many wars in which a small army did hold off a larger

army for a long time. The Ukrainian stand does seem so much like our own history of colonists defeating large British regiments, because they knew the land, could hide, and act as snipers etc. We hope the Ukrainians might be as successful. I also was struck by an article about the Mongols, under Genghis Khan, who “overran Europe in 1241... *and taught the Red Army how to fight.*” Apparently the Russian military has military manuals about the strategies of the Mongols, how they sacked cities, attacking from many sides, in battles of annihilation; victory for them was utter destruction of enemies. Sadly, it sounds too familiar.

But one of the things that stood out to me the most in this Military History magazine was the ending of one article: “*Our penchant for violence and mayhem has shown no signs of abating.*” Sad but true. Human beings still think that force and violence are the way to get what you want. We do not learn lessons of history quickly. When will we learn... that violence always breeds more violence. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth can easily become an escalating war Where are the signs and stories about successful peacemaking? I'll have to find a book on *Peacemaking History: Stories of Peace Treaties*, stories of “de-escalations,” stories of reconciliations after wartime. These are the most important stories to remember and re-live. They are the stories of a God of Grace and Peace and Love.

Back to our personal and everyday lives... It seems to me that we really need to appreciate all three parts of our lives: Past, Present, and Future! The past (history) does give us both memories (or lessons) of what not to repeat, as well as wonderful memories to cherish that we hope to experience again in the future. The Present is indeed so important, important to be fully alive to the present moment; yet it leads seamlessly into the future. We enjoy the present moment, seize the day, yet it always has a bit of

anticipation, a bit of hope. We naturally add the beautiful element of dreams and visions for our future!

Let's take a moment of silence to remember blessings of the past (OK, perhaps some tough lessons and redemptions as well!) Like the old song says, "Count your blessings, name them one by one!" Experience the quietness or sounds or thoughts of the present moment, and see if any of them spill into hopes and dreams for the future! (1 minute of silence) ... I think most of us can remember amazing things of the past: births, marriages, achievements, people who have been great mentors to us. They are SIGNS to us of blessings, of God in our lives, which naturally give us reasons to get up and greet the present day, and give us hope for the future.

As you may guess, I found a relevant song from one very wise soul (who is coming soon!). In this song, Ken Medema admits that God is often elusive, not visible, hard to find. But with wonderful insight, Ken reminds us that *tomorrow*, while a mystery, always has the promises and glimpses of God's light: "I see the way the rocks and the flowers shine." (The light we see in flowers and the song we hear in birds give hope for each new day! The present moves into the future.) And perhaps more insightfully, Ken reminds us that Yesterday can be a Sign of God's presence (Perhaps alluding to the famous footprints poem, Ken says: "I see God's footprints next to mine." Blessings in the past give us confidence of God's blessings for the present and the future!) Here is the song:

Tomorrow's a Mystery (Yesterday's a Sign), by Ken Medema

1. I have traveled down 1000 hungry highways til my feet were sore and bleeding, in search of your face. I have seen you there before me like a shining apparition. When I reached out arms to

*touch you, you were gone without a trace. I have crossed the bloody river I have walked the desert sands. I have slept on jagged rocks where you have run, and I have felt the stinging pain. I have followed you up mountains. I have traced your path in valleys. I have chased you to the wall where you have disappeared and fooled me once again. **REFRAIN: Every time I look before me you're always out of sight. But I know that you have been here, 'cause I see the way the rocks and the flowers shine. Every time I look behind me, I know that we have walked this road together, you and I; I see your footprints next to mine. Tomorrow's a mystery, and yesterday is a sign.***

*2. I have gone to all the healers and the hackers and the seers and the sayers who told me for a price they would teach me your name. I have learned to speak a language that I did not understand. I have called you in the night and in the day: the silence is the same. I have looked at all the statues. I have seen the artists portraits. I have walked inside the houses they have made for you, and I did not see you there. I have seen you there before me in the darkness of the night, and when I go to light the room, there is no substance: you're invisible as air. **REFRAIN.***

*3. I have looked for you in barrios and I have looked for you in bars. I have traveled down dark alleys where I never did think I'd go. I have traced your dancin' footsteps among the huddles of the hungry. I have learned a lot of things about this human race that I did not want to know. I have seen you in my minds eye from an airplane in the night sky, like a mystifying monolith surrounded by a circle of fire. I have heard you like a river as it's roaring down the canyon, and I know I will be drowned while the water rises higher and higher. **REFRAIN***