

Wednesday September 5, 2012

The future loses some of its allure

By Jim Taylor

I had another birthday last weekend. It passed without making much of a splash.

Which is, oddly enough, symbolic of the way most of my life has unfolded. Things I planned, things I dreamed about, didn't always work out. But the unexpected things more than made up for it.

According to Myers-Briggs Personality Types, I'm an INTP – introverted, intuitive, thinking, perceptive. That means I prefer to look inward than outward. I'm more likely to anticipate the future than to immerse myself in the present. I tend to analyze rather than empathize.

By way of example, I took friends to Maligne Canyon in Jasper National Park a couple of weeks ago. The morning sun slanted low through the trees, through the mist rising from the roiling water, etching the canyon walls with deep shadows...

My friends were suitably awestruck.

But I think I got more pleasure from first anticipating and then observing their enjoyment than from being there myself.

But if it hadn't happened at all, if we had done something else, I wouldn't have been upset for long. That's the "perceptive" element, a willingness to go with the flow than cling to a predetermined plan.

Time to go with the flow

I find that anticipation often surpasses reality.

I was 11 when my missionary parents brought me to Canada. I had read Ernest Thompson Seton's books about living in the Canadian woods. I knew about voyageurs and fur traders. I imagined myself fearlessly braving the wilderness in a canoe.

An urban fourplex in Toronto didn't quite measure up.

Later I dreamed about becoming a writer. Indeed, I did become one. But it wasn't as glamorous as I had dreamed.

I had a few misconceptions about being a husband and father, too ...

Not that life has been a disappointment. Far from it. I've visited places many people have barely heard of. I've met the movers and shakers of church, government, and business. I've received half a dozen honorary awards.

But all of those came as unplanned bonuses.

Sometimes I think Someone manipulates events so they work out right. Sometimes I give Someone a name – God.

But then my Thinking side challenges with my Intuitive side. Because my rational Thinker rejects the notion of a deity who diddles with reality for one individual's benefit. Bluntly put, I cannot believe in a God who saves one person from a tsunami and lets 400,000 others drown; who heals one person's cancer and lets others expire miserably; who gives one person financial security while others scabble for scraps...

And yet...

Over and over, things have happened at the right time. Meeting my wife. Getting job offers out of the blue. Being chosen as a friend. I didn't plan these, didn't earn them, didn't deserve them.

As another year ticks by, I realize I can't make long term plans anyway. I won't live forever. The time I have left is much shorter than the time that has already passed.

So I might as well go with the flow, and see what happens. There's no point in anticipating a future that may not happen. Whether or not Someone is watching over me.

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YOUR TURN

Last week I did some musing about magazine racks as a quick snapshot of the society in which they exist.

Allan Baker wanted to push a little harder about what was, and wasn't, in my drug store's rack. "What, for example, if we were to view the makeup of the magazines as a political statement? Or, given the current climate change crisis, what is the magazine industry's message to the purchasers of their magazines about this -- other than 'buy more and add to the catastrophe'?"

Some magazines, I think, are clear about their political orientation: Harper's on the left, the Economist leaning to the right... And of course the gun lobby is so far right it considers the Economist to be Marxist propaganda... But most magazines would probably consider themselves a-political. Their preferences can only be discerned by implication, by critical examination of what they seem to stand for.

Hmmm. There might be a column there somewhere.

Charles Hill explored motivations: "I believe that there is a commonality with all of our desires beyond survival. That is, 'comparison.' Our human ego wants to be at least equal and usually superior to others. We compare our bodies, homes, cars, and sometimes size of churches to others. Most individuals are concrete thinkers and superiority comes from tangible objects: bodies, cars, etc. Who among us is satisfied with what God has given us if someone else has more or better? There isn't any problem with wanting a better body if you are destroying the one you have with food or lack of exercise. It is a problem when you compare yourself with someone who has bigger -- or smaller -- but you have a healthy body. Our egos want to be better than or have more than. Does the Bible (and other holy books) say anything about what motivation should drive us?"

Isabel Gibson sent along a quote from Gail Sheehy, which she read and noted "decades ago."

Gail wrote, "Would that there were an award for people who come to understand the concept of enough. Good enough. Successful enough. Thin enough. Rich enough. Socially responsible enough. When you have self-respect, you have enough."

Isabel added, "Living by it, ahh, that's another matter."

On the concept of "enough," Wayne Irwin wrote, "OK, got it. And I agree. But I still want 'more' of your thoughtful offerings."

There were a couple of letters connected to the psalm paraphrases I include with Soft Edges.

Wesley White let me know that "I used your paraphrase in my lection comment today." If you're interested in following Wesley's lectionary blog, it is <http://kcmlection.blogspot.com/2012/08/psalm-451-2-6-9.html>

And Hugh Pett caught me in an error: "This coming Sunday is September 2nd, not Sept. 1 as mentioned in the introduction today to Psalm Paraphrases." Oops.

PSALM PARAPHRASES

As I write this, Joan and I have just returned from a three-day drive through the mountains and valleys of B.C.'s Kootenays. We used to visit there regularly when Joan's parents were still alive. This version of Psalm 125 seems appropriate.

1 Mountains are not easily moved.

God's people have faith like that.

2 As mountains cluster around a little town,
cradling its flower-decked houses
in the hollow of their valleys,

so God wraps loving arms around her children,
protecting them from abuse and exploitation.
3 Hands of hate shall not harm them;
guns and war toys will not land in their cribs.
They will not be tempted by violence later in life;
they will have no desire to make victims of others.

4 Let it be so, Lord.
Let a good start lead to goodness as an adult.
Show us that there is an innate fairness in the universe.

5 Let those who turn away from you,
who prefer their own ways to yours,
suffer the consequences of their choices.

Those who follow your way do not expect fame or fortune.
But let there be fairness.

For other paraphrases, you can order *Everyday Psalms* through Wood Lake Publications, info@woodlake.com or 1-800-663-2775.

YOU SCRATCH MY BACK...

If you know someone else who might like to receive this column regularly via e-mail, send a request to jimt@quixotic.ca. Or, if you wish, forward them a copy of this column. But please put your name on it, so they don't think I'm sending out spam.

For other web links worth pursuing, try

- David Keating's "SeemslkeGod" page, www.seemslkegod.org;
- Isobel Gibson's thoughtful and well-written blog, isabel@traditionaliconoclast.com
- Alan Reynold's weekly musings, punningly titled "Reynolds Rap," write reynoldsrap@shaw.ca
- Wayne Irwin's "Churchweb Canada," an inexpensive service for any congregation wanting to develop a web presence, with free consultation. <http://www.churchwebcanada.ca>
- Alva Wood's satiric stories about incompetent bureaucrats and prejudiced attitudes in a small town are not particularly religious, but they are fun; write alvawood@gmail.com to get onto her mailing list.

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You can access several years of archived columns at <http://edges.Canadahomepage.net>.

I write a second column each Sunday called Sharp Edges, which tends to be somewhat more cutting about social and justice issues. To sign up for Sharp Edges, write to me directly, at jimt@quixotic.ca, or send a note to sharpedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca
