

NOVEMBER 13, 2022 SUNDAY DEVOTIONAL

CENTERING PRAYER:

May the words that I write /say and the thoughts in our minds be all yours! Amen

SCRIPTURE FOCUS: 1 CORINTHIANS 2: 9

But, as it is written, [Heaven is]

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the human heart conceived,
what God has prepared for those who love him.”

AND REVELATION 7:13-14:

3 Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?” 14 I said to him, “Sir, you are the one who knows.” Then he said to me, “These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

BLESSED THOUGHTS: “WHAT HAPPENS IN HEAVEN?”

Herb Brokering was so gifted as a poet, teacher, and hymn writer, but especially as a mentor for those of us who ministered to youth. It was 1973, in Houston, Texas, when he taught about fifty of us how to see God’s handiwork using the power of our imagination. At this session he used a quilt which a youth staffer had given him. He tossed it on the floor and then challenged us to “see it” as something God wanted to teach us. It was an amazing evening, and I still use his techniques all these years later.

Well, let’s let Dr. Brokering, who died in 2009 at the age of eighty-three, focus our imaginative thoughts on what we’ll experience when we get to heaven. First, though, let’s “delete” some of the stuff you and I may have thought we knew about the Age to Come.

Heaven is not a Loyalty Points Program. Several times a week my wife and I get food at the McDonald’s drive-through window. I used to tear off the stamps from their coffee cups and stick them on a card. When you handed in a card with seven stamps, you got the next one free. Now they’ve ditched that because the young people live and die by Smart Phones, and if you’ve downloaded your McDonald’s App, you get a code and with every purchase you get “points” towards a “free” burger or drink. Like I said, I’m too dumb to use a Smart Phone, and too smart to order all those food items that are bad for me anyhow,

But some Christians still believe that every time we do a good deed or show up for worship, or volunteer for a worthy cause, God enters loyalty points in the Afterlife on a Treasure in Heaven App. Well, no, there is Treasure in Heaven, but that’s our Lord and all our loved ones Jesus has redeemed, and that’s all there by grace, and not by our ‘good works.’ Even I know that’s the corner stone of our Lutheran teaching.

Do Roman Catholics still believe in Purgatory? Purgatory is a sort of waiting around area until we’re “good enough” to pass through the pearly gates. This is another version of what happens after we die. ***Purgatory is sort of like a Cosmic High School Detention Room*** where folks who have really screwed up or sinned badly have to spend anywhere from a few months to several centuries as punishment for their sins. Now, as a former high school teacher, I always thought teachers were as much punished by detention as were the students! I went directly from teaching my High School classes to my afternoon to evening job as a Librarian. So, I never gave

detention, especially because I remembered that I used to be young myself. Get this. There is really not one Bible verse that talks about A Detention Purgatory that awaits us. Even one Priest suggested that God's time is not like our time anyway. Now that is Biblical. For God, a thousand years is like a day, and vice-versa, so flush that Purgatory concept, too.

Well, what does await us? I'm going to suggest a model that may get us a bit closer, which I call ***God's Residential Treatment Facility***. Now remember that after I left full-time pastoral ministry, my first job was working in a Residential Therapeutic Facility for boys with substance abuse and mental health issues. I always had to bring my A-Game to that job, and almost every day I had to physically restrain some out-of-control lad from hurting himself or someone else. My wife caught me covered in bruises from one kid's daily attacks! But I always thought that if—God forbid—my son or grandson ended up in such a place, I would want someone like myself on that staff who really cared! And that's the guy I tried to be.

So, what is God fixing us up for? I think it's something bigger than taking harp lessons (although there is such a shortage of church musicians today). Scripture suggests that even though there's a whole army of angels, God still prefers to work through folks like you and me. Heaven seems to be a place where we get prepared for some higher service activity. But what? Hmm?

Let's go back to this life, here and now. ***This life is my Second Posting***, so to speak. I spent my first nine months in a sort of one-person Paradise called "Mom." No worries, food and waste disposal on demand, surrounded by love and warmth and always safe (there was no such a thing as abortion back then—people wanted babies, and I was pretty cute)! Then came a big Trauma called "Birth." One doctor described it this way. "Imagine if you had to exit a burning apartment by squeezing through a ventilation duct, blindfolded, and under enormous pressure. Don't you think that experience would leave its scars?" Well, mine did, and so did yours. To this day I have a scar called the Navel (yes, I'm an Innie), but I also hate being cold and I apparently have left-over anxiety that may have something to do with being born in the midst of a Global War. But ever since that Tuesday evening in late July, 1943, life has had its challenges. I still wrestle with PTSD from several childhood and later adult Traumas, I survived (barely) five major depressive episodes, and my social work assignment in child welfare exposed me to severe emotional harm, as well as physical danger... (Thank God for my Martial Arts training!). But the hardest part of this Second Life of ours may just be all the Grief and Loss we go through. I could write a whole book on that subject, but I'll leave it at this. When a loved one dies, we suffer the loss of one person who was especially close to our soul, and this happens about once every five years or so. But when I die, I'm going to be separated from everyone who cares about me, and because I have meant a lot to scads of people, that's going to leave a big pain, which I hope my funeral service will start to heal.

Yet no one goes through that Second Birth Trauma totally healed. So, in the Age to Come, all the Sacrificial Love God poured out for us sinners on the Cross is going to be our Ultimate Healing and that is why I envision what we usually call "Heaven" as God's Residential Therapeutic Community. All the good images of heaven we hear at funerals, such as the Marriage Feast of the Lamb, the great Reunions with loved ones, the Clearing up of all the "Mysteries" which threatened to confound us in this life, all of them—and more—will, I believe, be part of the Great Healing that awaits us.

And what happens after that must await until s later Sunday devotional.

And, if you would love to be further inspired by my Mentor, Dr. Brokering, link to this youtube performance of his great hymn, "Earth and All Stars," sung by all those great young people at St. Olaf's College. Just click on:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xTIH8IAqGAQ>

–written just before Thanksgiving dinner at my daughter's house!