



March 4, 2024

Although God Seems Invisible

Today's "Faith Matters" is dedicated to the many soldiers, men and women, who held on to the above conviction, even as an Unseen God held on to them. One day, years ago, Dad asked us the question,

"What Day of the Year Is Dedicated to the Army?"

The first time, we came up with answers like: Memorial Day, or Veterans Day, even July 4th. With a not so hidden smile, Dad replied, "It's Today, 'March Forth! (4th)'" Dad served in the army in World War Two. He knew what it was to "March Forth!" He learned how to catch a quick shut-eye on the road in between marches. He knew what it was to serve in a platoon of twelve and find himself one of four survivors. He knew what it was to serve on a mission crossing the Rhine in a four-person raft, in full view of German soldiers on the other bank, and be the only survivor, after a period of time Missing-In-Action. He knew what it was to be seriously injured requiring hospital care first in Europe, and then back in the United States. Dad also knew something else, something that not a few other soldiers quietly knew. They knew that they were not alone and that God was with them even when the eyes in their head could not see, the eyes of their heart trusted. And God met their trust.

In November of 1944, the First Presbyterian Church of Evanston, Illinois, Christmas gifted to Dad, and other soldiers from that

congregation, a copy of The Great Answer, written by Margaret Lee Runbeck. It is a soul-replenishing collection of stories of many who experienced a distant God come very close to them in life-expiring circumstances. Dad carried this book in his duffle bag, and the worn cover shows it. In one of the stories, a marine in a sea battle off Guadalcanal carries the following hymn verse in his mind.

“O blest is he to whom is given
The instinct that can tell
That God is on the field, although
He seems invisible.”*

Though his own gun is rendered useless, fear no longer grips him. He races around assisting his shipmates in any way he can, and the peace he carries, passes on to them. Sometime later after their own ship sinks, he is pulled aboard a raft where the other soldiers think the best chance for survival is to make their way to an island highly likely occupied by the enemy. After his expressed concerns, he repeats the above verse-prayer and offers to row if they will direct him. A fog envelops the raft, and when it clears, the occupied island is no longer in sight, but what is in sight is an American destroyer, which spots them and takes them aboard. Out of all the stories in this book, it is this verse to which I have returned, again and again in recent days and weeks when I see life-expiring and hope-disappointing events around the world and in our country, too.

So today, as we all “March 4th/Forth”, O Soldier in Christ,
How blessed are you, to whom is given the instinct that
can tell
That God Is On The Field....with you.

* From the hymn, “*Workman of God, O Lose Not Heart*”, written by Frederick Faber in 1849. The hymn may be obscure, because the tune that first went with it is less singable than some. I have found that singing it to the tune of “Amazing Grace”, fits in many ways.

~Written by The Rev. Dr. Bruce Brooks

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