

Column

A fine line exists between stability and inflexibility. The first is necessary to the survival of an individual and a society. Predictability – another word for stability -- creates space for growth and is necessary for human flourishing in a constantly changing world.

Inflexibility, meanwhile, renders higher vistas impossible to reach and leads to stagnation. It is actually an affront to the God who is always calling us to come up higher into His life of love and service. Yielded to, inflexibility robs life of adventure.

Needless to say, we want to land on the side of stability, but what might that stability look like?

I am reminded of a toast from the dark days of the Second World War. At that time, Airforce Sgt. John Ross Apperson closed a letter written to Dr. Alexander Guerry, the Vice-Chancellor of The University of the South, with these words: “To a new world, but the same Sewanee.” (Sewanee is an alternate name for the University.)

The post-war world was going to be different. Nevertheless, the Christian principles, values and traditions upon which this institution was founded would still stand and remain worthy of passing on to future generations.

Put another way, those things that are good, true and beautiful would still be good, true and beautiful. They must not be left behind or forgotten in the world that would emerge from the war.

Christians today might take their cue from Sgt. Apperson’s toast, changing the words to: “To a new world, but the same Lord Jesus Christ and the same Church.”

“Wisdom and knowledge [of the Lord] shall be the stability of thy times” wrote the prophet Isaiah 700 years before the birth of Christ (33:6). In a world of Fauci and fear, of civil upheaval and political angst, the prophet’s words, no less than those in Apperson’s toast, still stand.

God’s people have passed through many dark days and have had to face many challenges. Through them all, God’s wisdom and strength have provided a place for God’s people to stand, and stood they did.

Reflecting on the stability God provided in former times, 19th century hymnwriter Edward Plumptre asked in verse:

“And we, shall we be faithless? / Shall hearts fail, hands hang down? / Shall we evade the conflict, / And cast away our crown?”

His answer is a thunderous “Not so!” He goes on to say: We will maintain, / unflinching, One Church, one faith, one Lord!”

I pray this will be our resolve as well.

GRANT, O Lord, we beseech thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by thy governance, that thy Church may joyfully serve thee in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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