

## A LESSON IN HUMILITY

May 2020

The plan was simple: We would drive down to Mt. St. Helens and hike over to Harry's Ridge for spectacular views of Spirit Lake and the crater of the shattered mountain; then, the next day, we would drive over to Mount Rainier and hike up to just below the snowfield for a view of the Nisqually Glacier. Instead of the views what we got was a lesson in humility.

We were able to hike a bit at Mt. St. Helens, but our destination and what is left of the summit was shrouded with clouds. At Mount Rainier the trail we had planned to hike was covered with twelve feet of snow, left over from the 900 inches of the previous winter's snowfall. It was the middle of July. We were reminded that one meets a mountain on the mountain's terms. Sometimes one has to adapt.

One of my favorite films is "Dr. Zhivago." With its beautiful music, the stunning photography, and a powerful story, this film has become a classic. Set during the years of the Bolshevik revolution, it is the story of dislocation, accommodation and passion. In one scene Zhivago returns after a long absence to his spacious and gracious home. Shocked to find dozens of strangers living there and his family confined to a single room, he begins to complain to the people now in charge of the quarters. An officer, his half-brother, stops him with three simple, stern words. "Zhivago, adapt yourself!"

There are times and seasons in life when this counsel is the only wisdom that applies. We saw that when our encounter with the mountains didn't go as we had planned. In the mountains it is easy to get into trouble if one is not willing to adjust. Plans have to change, schedules have to become flexible, attitudes have to adapt. The problem is to know when to adapt, and how to adapt, and what to maintain.

We saw that in 2001 when, on a beautiful September Tuesday morning four airplanes were seized and terror changed the world at our own doorstep. In the face of bewilderment, loss, grief, anger, thoughts of retaliation, we were being forced to adapt to a new and unwelcome reality.

We are seeing that again as the COVID-19 Coronavirus lays its devastating grip on the world, and on everything we have taken for granted. Health care workers and systems have been stretched to their limits by this pandemic. People are out of work, worried how they will pay the rent or the mortgage and more. Children and youth are out to school, missing vital face to face education, missing their friends, missing their proms and their graduations. Summer plans are in disarray, we are masked and socially distanced for everyone's safety. Who would have ever guessed that grocery clerks would be on the front lines in the same way as police officers and emergency personnel? And yet here we are. Again we were being forced to adapt to a new and unwelcome reality.

It is easy to grow comfortable with familiar patterns, to make our plans, expect that all will go as we have planned, and protest when it doesn't. From time to time life intrudes and we are called to adapt ourselves. Those who refuse may pay a terrible price, and put others at risk as well. To say that God causes these intrusions is not helpful. But God can help us to respond to them. Our response is most helpful, and faithful, when we seek to discern, "What is our wisest response?" That requires a measure

of humility - a readiness in every circumstance of life to be led by God into a new way of life, and a capacity to be reconciled to life as it now is. In either case the result can lead to a sense of purpose and peace that recognizes that the Love of God never leaves us in a place where the grace of God cannot uphold us. In every season of faith God's Word of challenge and invitation is, "Adapt yourself!"

Hill Street Blues, the critically acclaimed drama always closed with the trademark line "Let's be careful out there." It was an admonition to be mindful that we live in a world that doesn't always go the way we expect it to go - that sometimes adapting ourselves to the world we encounter is the best response we can make, and the most faithful.

If we believe that God is in charge of the future, and I do; if we believe that Jesus is our most faithful companion, teacher and guide, and I do; if we believe that the Holy Spirit inspires us and empowers us, and I do; then we have all we need to face each day ahead with a sense of faith, hope, and love.