

23rd September 2020

Hope

“Hope springs exulting on triumphant wing.”

Robert Burns, The Cotter's Saturday Night

I reflected yesterday on the faith of Horatio Spafford which inspired him to write his great hymn, *It is well with my soul*. After a series of tragedies, culminating in the death of his four daughters, Spafford and his wife, Anna, went on to have three further children. However, the first of these, a young Horatio, was to die of scarlet fever aged three. This final tragedy, after a decade of financial loss and personal grief, alongside a lack of support from their church community, changed the course of the Spaffords' life.

In 1881, the family went to Jerusalem with a party of thirteen adults to set up what they called “The American Colony”. Joined by Swedish Christians, and spurning a proselyting approach, they served people in most need without regard to religious affiliation, gaining the trust of Muslim, Jewish and Christian communities. Spafford could have reacted to his tragedies by becoming an embittered man. But instead, he let his brokenness inform his life choices, and continued with a life of faithful service. He died in 1888 and is buried in Jerusalem's Mount Zion Cemetery.

Henri Nouwen's thought-provoking book, *The Wounded Healer*, offers hope those who want to serve their church or community but struggle because of their brokenness or uncertainties. He has this insight:

When we become aware that we do not have to escape our pains but that we can mobilise them into a common search for life, those very pains are transformed from expressions of despair into signs of hope.

Horatio Spafford didn't run away from the pain and tragedies of his life but sought to build on them and let them inform the rest of his life's work and witness. Engaged in Nouwen's “common search for life”, what could have been expressions of despair were wonderfully transformed into signs of hope. Like him, we can all be wounded healers. And with God's grace, and a willingness to accept our pains, we believe we can see these wounds offering healing and signs of hope to those most in need.

A prayer for today

Lift me in hope, Lord, on your exultant wing, to bear me ever forwards. Amen

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