

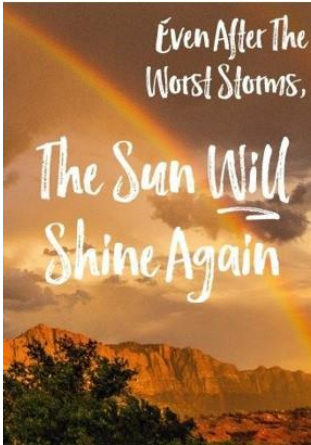
New Hope Global Sermon- A Season of Clear Shining

Introduction

Years ago in an Asian Outreach ministry I co-ran in Chicago, we sang an old hymn that the Spirit brought to mind Thursday. The first verse was what was echoing in my heart:

“Sometime a light surprises the Christian while he sings; it is the Lord who rises with healing in His wings,
When comforts are declining, He grants the soul again a season of clear shining to cheer it after rain.”

A season of clear shining to cheer it after rain. Put in other words, even after the worst storms, the sun will shine again.



2020 was a time of “storms” and “rain” for people around the world. But God is the One who brings resurrection out of death and turns our heaviness into dancing (Isa. 61), our weeping into joy (Ps. 30:5), our fire and water testing to a place of abundance (Ps.66:10-12). He brings the rainbow, even a double rainbow when the sun shines after the storm.

So, this week I invite us to celebrate this same powerful, good God who gives a season of clear shining to cheer us after the rain of trouble and suffering.

David’s Story In Ps. 18

Psalms 18 is a clear example of how God did this for David. The Psalm opens with David saying to the Lord: “I love You, O Lord, my strength.” He celebrates God as his fortress, his deliverer, the rock in which he takes refuge, his shield, his stronghold and his salvation (v. 2-3). That’s the season of clear shining. But the “rain” in David’s life is described in v. 4-18 – the cords of death wrapped around him (v.4-5), foes who were too great for him (v.17), distress, deep waters (v. 16), a sense of disaster (v.18).

Yet, it was in that context of great trouble that David says:

“The Lord was my support. He brought me out into a spacious place” (v.18-19). He is a shield for all who take refuge in him. (v.30), giving us his shield of victory (v.35).

He girds me with strength and makes my way safe (v.32)

He broadens the path beneath me so that my ankles do not turn (v.36). He turns my darkness into light” (v. 28).



These are all powerful metaphors that describe the refuge and victory God provides for His people. And this God is our God and is able to do the same thing for each of His children around the world today.

This past week there have been two special examples of “the season of clear shining that cheer the soul after rain.” Both involve what is happening beyond an individual – blessings involving a community and a nation.

Moving to Stage Three in the Publication Selection Process

The “Our” when we describe our book *Thinking Outside the Box* is actually the entire church community of New Hope Global Fellowship and other international friends we are connected to. Although Alex Zhou and I are the primary authors, the book incorporates many stories of Asian internationals’ experience in adapting as Asian Christians in their home contexts which are non-Christian. Their stories illustrate the gap between Western and Eastern thinking and the difficulties that come when Asians, discipled in the West, use Western paradigms to explain the gospel in the east. We started our book about four years ago as Alex and many others were experiencing that gap, but Alex’s completion of his JSD (his PhD in law) kept him from working on the book for a

couple of years. However, in 2020, due to Covid's restrictions of travel and Alex's freer time after graduation, we renewed our efforts to finish the book.

God certainly works through connections and after Keith and I moved to Florida, I was put in contact with a CEO of a networking mission agency that connects several of the Christian organizations I have worked for in the past. I showed Ted, the CEO, the abstract for the book and his immediate response was to send that abstract to his key contact at William Carey Publishers (WCP). This amazing connection paved the way for the publisher to actually consider our book. In my prior two books, I didn't have that inside connection with publishing houses so my manuscripts were not even considered. I ended up self-publishing through WestBow Press.

Many of you were involved in prayers as the abstract went to WCP and we waited for word of their initial interest. Their acceptance of our first stage of application then moved us to phase two in the publication selection process. The prayers for favor grew in intensity. This December the publishers wrote and said they would consider our proposal as a Board in January. And on January 21, I received this cover letter:

Dear Dr. Mary Lou,
Thanks again for your patience as we reviewed your proposal. WCP would very much like to read the full manuscript, and I have attached the decision letter and submission guidelines for you.
We are looking forward to reading more from you.
Blessings,
Katie McGaffey, Publishing Coordinator, William Carey Publishing

All the difficulties (the "rain") so many of us faced in 2020 were like jungle rains that come sporadically in torrents. As the hymn says, "comforts were declining." There were struggles with a sense of dislocation and disjointedness fueled by disappointed expectations.

BUT GOD.

The invitation letter from WCP has definitely marked "a season of clear shining to cheer the soul after rain!" We send the full manuscript to WCP at their invitation by Feb. 28. Then we hope the community prayer will continue for favor to move the book to final acceptance and publication with this prestigious missions publishing house.

Example One.

Hope Renewed in the US After the Biden Election

The second evidence of a "clear shining after rain" has come in the US with the election of Joseph Biden. January 6th the entire fabric of our democracy was threatened when the far right insurrectionists, white supremacists, people who believed all of Trump's conspiracy theories, and turned a blind eye on the moral bankruptcy of his character, stormed the Capital of the US, seeking to overturn the election. They acted contrary to the Constitution and the well-documented, fair election of Biden. People held their breath to see if the violence of the 6th ignited by President Trump's inflammatory oratory just moments before, would eventually engulf the whole country and lead to civil war.

But God has had mercy on this nation and Biden has been successful installed as our 46th President. His election is like "the shining after rain" for a number of reasons.

1. Trump's consistent rhetoric for four years has been to promote white supremacy, to work toward an authoritarian regime, fueled by allegiance to one man and the lies that have deepened the divides in the country. Biden's promise is to restore a "determined democracy, calling us to be united and better than we have been. He advocates listening and showing respect to one another. In his words, "I will be President for all Americans. We are to defend the truth and defeat the lies. We must end this uncivil war."

2. The diverse group of people on the platform at the inauguration represented the multiethnicity that is an inherent foundation of the US. Those leaders are also first-fruits of Biden's pledge to work for justice. Again, Biden's words; "The dream of justice for all will be deferred no longer. We must confront and we must defeat the extremists and white supremacists" [whose anger and principles have split the country and tried to exclude all people of color].

3. Biden's call for unity across party lines was for "enough of us to come together to carry all of us forward" (NYTimes, Jan.21, 21 front page.). His emphasis parallels the call of Jesus for Christians to be united as an evidence of God's reality and salvation (Jn.17).

4. There were multiple, sincere references to God and God's blessing, God's empowerment of unity, and God's healing and restoration needed in our present fractious state. That emphasis on the Lord and not showcasing one political leader (as had been the case in the Trump era) was thoroughly Biblical. In fact, Biden's moral character and efforts to live out the model of diversity, justice and love seen in the Scripture was a healing presence in itself – in stark contrast to Trump's immoral dishonesty, and sowing of the spirit of vindictiveness, mistrust, hatred and divisiveness. The choice of the hymn Amazing Grace at the Inaugural showcased this emphasis on the Lord and our unity, as people all sang it together.

5. In talking to his nominees for the various posts in the new administration, he emphasized "You are not working for me. You are working for all the American people under the law of the Constitution." That is a very different focus from Trump's insistence that each person in Government worked for him. Loyalty that differed to and promoted Trump was the agenda rather than a loyalty to the Constitution and the American public who the leaders are called to serve.

The immediate situation in the United States is neither peaceful nor united. But this stark change after the January 20 inauguration is like the shining of hope after the rain of poisoned politics.

So, let's celebrate the goodness of the Lord that has brought about these two great evidences of God's redemptive work and trust Him that these Easter-like moments would continue to produce in the American people and in our global relationships with others the appropriate spirit of joy and safety and faith. All for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Dr. Mary Lou Codman-Wilson, Pastor, New Hope Global Fellowship 1/26/21.