



*Dan Nolta*

A couple of months ago, another resident here at Friendsview Retirement Community came up to me after a Resident Association meeting and just said, “John 14:27.” My mind swept back over the years to verses I had memorized when I was a relatively new Christian. My brain engaged, and my mouth began to spout forth: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you....”—the exact rendering of the verse, long ago memorized as a part of the Navigator’s memory system. My friend had been perusing an old George Fox College yearbook, came across my picture with my favorite verse listed as John 14:27, and decided to test me; I passed.

Shortly thereafter I received an e-mail, “Would you be willing to write for *Fruit of the Vine* again?” My answer, “Of course!” I now had the subject of my writing at hand—the memory verses that I had “[hidden] in my heart” nearly sixty years ago.

Judi and I continue to live here at Friendsview Retirement Community in Newberg, Oregon. While she finds her resting place these days in the Health Center, I find mine in my cozy little apartment with enough room for my stuff, a warm place to sleep, a kitchen for cooking, and a computer table where I write.

*BIBLE READING: 2 Corinthians 5:12–17 (KJV)*

*“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (v. 17).*

This is the King James version of the verse I memorized, and I have lived in its challenge since that day.

To be in Christ—what can that mean? What are the implications? What can that mean for my life? Those were the questions that possessed my mind, and I dare say my imagination, when I first came to Christ. My imagination claimed that new life, that new creation, and I began to live into it, daring to believe that it could possibly be true.

I found it to be true as the old began to fade away, and the new life slowly took the place of the old. Pains, regrets, and shame of my childhood began to be replaced by the presence of Christ.

I could claim it took place in a proverbial heartbeat, but that would not be true for me. A gradual growth, a gradual change, as the fears in my life, which had largely ruled my every action and reaction, slowly slipped away, and I could finally claim that the new had truly come.

*SONG: Jesus Be the Center*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: God, even in these later years, I give you permission to continue to remodel my life and to keep at it until I can confess before all that you truly are the center.*

—Dan Nolta

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*BIBLE READING: Matthew 6:24–34 (KJV)*

*“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (v. 33).*

Matthew 6:33 was another of the King James verses that I memorized after beginning the Navigator’s memory program. This entire passage might be called the values verses. Particularly where it says, “For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.” We must carefully consider the differences between *need* and *want*. This passage focuses on what we need. We need clothing, food, and shelter—the bare essentials if you will.

While I have experienced a number of cultures that are different from my own, I always heave a sigh of relief when I find myself back on American soil where there seems to be an abundance of almost everything. While my childhood was lived out in the aftermath of World War II, I have little desire to go back to those years of doing without because of rationing, or to the days of family hardship.

At the same time, I find myself admiring those who practice a life of simplicity, seeking to pare down, coming always closer to living with only the necessities. Would that we could all at least consider that lifestyle and discover we could live with less.

*SONG: Seek Ye First*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, help me to find balance in my life, to know the difference between needs and wants, and to put what I have learned into practice daily.*

—Dan Nolta

*BIBLE READING: 1 John 5:11–13 (KJV)*

*“And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life” (vv. 11–12).*

It is difficult this morning to recount the number of times that verse has been my anchor, my life ring, tossed from the boat to this drowning baby Christian, as well as this now adult—supposedly—mature Christian.

I have often watched with fear as waves of circumstance mount and surge forward, menacing my very shaky life and faith. It is then that the words of 1 John 5:11–12 come surging into my consciousness, and I feel the panic begin to recede, and the assurance of my salvation comes forward once again. The waves subside, the seas of circumstance calm, and peace is restored.

To this day I count on that verse to be my own. I count on the fact that one day, years ago, I gave my life to Christ, and he came in as he said he would. Today I can rejoice in the fact that I have life, every day—new life in Christ.

*SONG: Blessed Assurance, Jesus Is Mine*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: God, may each of us, at this very moment, be filled with the wonderful knowledge that our salvation is assured by your presence in our lives.*

—Dan Nolta

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 119:1–11 (KJV)*

*“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word....Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (vv. 9, 11).*

I suppose that excuses are in order: too busy, advancing age, my stroke of a couple of years ago, not enough time in the day, and so on. But the truth is, I just fancied myself too busy. Yes, there have been some residual effects from my stroke that make it difficult to memorize, but in the end, no excuses. I just didn't keep up with memorizing Scripture. That is one of the great regrets of my life!

But today I am just thankful for those verses that I did memorize as a young man, albeit, they were all from the King James Version. So here come the KJV words into my head at the most opportune times. They remind me of God's grace. They remind me of the peace to be enjoyed. They remind me of God's provision. They just remind me.

Dear reader, don't do as I did. Please keep memorizing, or start memorizing, while your brain will yet allow it.

*SONG: Thy Word Have I Hid in My Heart*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, today we pray that you will remove the obstacles, the excuses, and aid us as we seek to hide your Word in our hearts.*

—Dan Nolta

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*BIBLE READING: John 14:23–27 (KJV)*

*“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (v. 27).*

Early this morning as I begin to write, I feel like my subject—peace—is a many-tailed snake. I am reaching but cannot decide which tail to grab. Talking current American politics hardly seems safe. But not talking about them seems disingenuous as we stand on the threshold of an open door to peace with North Korea. But even last night there was a report that Kim Jung Un wants to pull back from the door that seemed, even a few days ago, to be swinging wide. Thus is the playbook on the political scene.

News is nothing but news of the moment—until it all plays out, and we move on. Not so with Scripture, that so tenderly bids each of us to pay attention to the coming of the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost the Spirit does come, and at last the possibility of peace, the peace that passes understanding, is available to all who believe.

Years ago, I believed that promise, claimed it as my own, and began to live it. Can I claim a constant peace? No. Can I say I am never worried? No. Then how is that promise played out in my life? It is played out as I steadfastly believe it, and keep my heart and mind focused on Christ and the Holy Spirit whose fruit is peace. Jesus is the source of peace that is mine.

*SONG: Spirit of the Living God*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: God, today I realize that only by keeping my eyes on you can I maintain a sense of peace. May it be so.*

—Dan Nolta

*BIBLE READING: Proverbs 3:3–6 (KJV)*

*“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (vv. 5–6).*

Way back in my pastoral days, I was sitting in my office and felt directed to go visit a particular household. I did as I was directed, and when I got there, the lady answered the door and said, “I was just praying that you would come by today.” She then began telling me of the problems she was having.

That did not happen often, but it did happen often enough that I began to pay special attention to that type of direction—a very immediate, *do it now* kind of direction. Then there were all the *chance* encounters that perhaps led to a stranger coming into relationship with the Lord. Chance encounters, or God-led encounters?

Although we consider how God directs moment by moment, we can also look back and see God’s hand on the totality of our lives. I see the hand of God upon my life beginning with salvation, and I see ways God directed and engineered my steps, large and small: the big step that sent me to be a pastor, straight from George Fox College with my biology degree firmly in hand; then the major intersection in life that set me on the path to law enforcement chaplaincy. Today I am faced with following the path that God set before me in my wedding vows, now some fifty-eight years later—“For richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health.” That is perhaps the most significant and meaningful path of my lifetime.

*SONG: I Would Be True*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, I ask for strength to faithfully follow the path that you so obviously have set before me. May I walk it with heart, mind, and soul.*

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*BIBLE READING: Philippians 4:10–19 (KJV)*

*“But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (v. 19).*

This morning I have the advantage of being an old guy, because it allows me to survey a big percentage of my life and recount how God has been faithful in providing for our needs, just as God provided for the needs of the Philippian church. They gave a gift to share in Paul’s troubles and were promised that God would meet their need as they met Paul’s.

This story makes it seem that there might be an element of “give to get” in that circumstance. But I know God’s heart on this one. If we “give to get,” we shall not. The real requirement is faithfulness.

When I left my job as a pastor to begin my twenty years as a full-time chaplain, I had no guaranteed salary, no promised pension—it was all on God’s and my shoulders. As we recount those sometimes-difficult years, we realize that God’s promise is true. God has met our every need: school tuition for our children, a home paid off in time for retirement, and a place for retirement here at Friendsview.

I married a faithful woman. Judi has been faithful to me for nearly fifty-eight years. At this very moment she is faithfully, patiently enduring disease that will one day take her life. She is often smiling and often surrounded by our children, who love and treasure their momma.

*SONG: Great Is Thy Faithfulness*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: God, we are so grateful that you keep your promises. Thank you for the bountiful provision you have lavished on each and every part of our lives.*

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