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Psalm 63

God Is Holding Your Life: Desert Blues

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We can learn a lot about
our spiritual thirst and hunger,
by looking at what happens to us
when we are physically thirsty and hungry.

The first thing to learn is:
be prepared,
because we will eventually get hungry and thirsty
if we don't take along the provisions we need for
this journey called life.

We were in Olympic National Park,
in Washington State
heading out for a hike.
It was an unusually hot day
late June, especially for that part of the country.
The hike turned out to be more difficult
(many switchbacks and significant elevation gain)
and a lot longer than we estimated.
Which meant, the water and food we brought
for the four of us was not sufficient.
The energy bars were long ago
consumed and burned up,
all four water bottles were empty,
and we were all savoring and sucking the juice
from the sole nectarine,
And, we still had the last third of the trail to go
before we got to the trailhead
where we had parked our car.

More than a bit after
the nectarine consumption
we came across our first and only patch
of snow thus far.
Yes, we scooped up several
handfuls, and ate it.
A hiker no-no,
a good way to get sick
Let me just say –
pollution, dirty air, and a messed up ozone layer –
need I say anymore.
The good news is
we didn't get sick.

The time for any of us
to get what we need
is not after the flood waters have risen,
or the hurricane is at 80 PMH,
or the tornado is shaking your house
and starting to blow your roof off.

Rather, the time for any of us to get what we need
is in the calm before the storm.
The time for us to be prepared for
the time of spiritual hunger and thirst –
is before we are in the desert and get the desert blues.

It's hard enough to pray in a crisis,
but, harder still, if you haven't prayed much before then.
It's hard enough to become part of a community of faith
before a tragedy,
but harder still,
if you try and find comraderie and communion,
and to date haven't attended a church regularly.
It's hard enough to understanding the Bible,

but harder still, to know where to turn for
guidance and comfort,
if you haven't turned its pages since
when you got your first Bible in the 3rd grade
or for confirmation.

When we fail to tend to our needs,
with discard toward focused intentionality,
we end up settling for "whatever" -
that which is inferior,
that which is not good
or the best for us.
Instead of,
seizing and taking that which
is superior.

When our desert comes,
we can find ourselves settling
for drugs or alcohol, casual sex or an affair,
a compulsive an obsessive hobby or pastime,
inordinate amounts of screen time,
compulsive buying,
or the newest self-help book or trend.
In other words, eating snow with dirt,
Instead of being fed by the feast God provides
or drinking from the cool, pure, and refreshing stream.

Be prepared,
and don't settle for that which is inferior.
Settle on God, don't take any substitutions.

Let me just say a word here about
what happens to us physically and spiritually
when we stop eating and drinking.
I've had a mini-version of it

happen on a three day fast.
At first you're ravenous,
all you can think about is food, food, and food.
And, that is what happens to us when
we first recognize our hunger.
Yet, by the middle of the second day,
I lost my hunger, and was merely
lethargic and dulled.
I had lost my appetite.
Let me just say here,
it is dangerous to delay getting
the calories you need,
your sustenance, and
your nourishment.

Some of us have been spiritually
hungry and thirsty for so long
what we have now is nothing but,
lethargy that looms,
and a despair that dulls us.

Failing to continue to notice
becoming complacent
regarding the facts of our
spiritual thirst and hunger
is quite dangerous and very risky.
Because, there comes a point
when we won't care anymore,
and thus, we will let things stay
just as they are –
which if unaddressed,
will leave us emaciated
and may lead us
even closer to death.

The fourth concerning thing
 (besides being unprepared, settling for less than God, and
 losing our spiritual appetite) is when we can be heard to say,
 there's nothing in the desert:
 it's devoid of goodness and beauty,
 it's a wasteland, it has nothing to offer me,
 it is good for absolutely nothing - nada.

How wrong that conclusion is
 was brought home to me during my
 September trip to Acadia National Park.
 Anyone who knows me,
 knows I hate the beach.
 My instant desire is to holler at the waves
 "Shut Up".
 The constant battering sound
 drives me crazy, full-blown nuts!
(Seagull on rocks next to the waves)
 I'm thinking while I am shooting this photograph,
 "Dude, how do you stand this?"

Suffice it to say, Acadia changed how I look at the ocean.
 Somehow this time:
 the waves didn't cause me to hear merely
 that unrelenting roar,
(Waves on beach)
 I also saw the many hues of the color-
 blue and green and white
(Small boat in the ocean)
 and the magnificence of expanse of water
 which can cause one to look beyond the waves
(Morning sunrise over the ocean)
 into the awe and wonder and grandeur of the ocean.
 I also saw that which lies underneath the

deep dark water
(*Tide Out: Photo Collage*)
when the bay water receded at low tide
and I could walk on the sandbar
to see beauty that is
not apparent on the surface,
but underneath.

For in the water,
there was revelation
a chance to see God, myself and those who companion me
on this journey, in a whole new light.
Look close, for in the reflection (of the place I hated the
most) – in the bubble
are some of the things I love the most: see them –
Friends Cheryl, Pat, and their dog Joy, and Lynne.
I am the one holding the camera,
using it as a way to slow myself down,
in order to see what is there,
all of what is there,
not just what I think is there,
to see what I might have overlooked or missed otherwise.

So, if you find that desert will be
your destination for awhile
then, be prepared,
don't settle for less than God,
don't become dull, lethargic or emaciated,
get nourishment.
And look for wonderful things there,
for the desert has beauty and goodness
all its own.