Flapping Wings

It’s not listed on the New York Times bestseller list and you won’t find it in the Regent Library or Bookstore. But I recommend it as a post-graduation reading assignment. *The Prison Diary of Perpetua* is acknowledged by many scholars to be one of, if not the earliest surviving example of Christian writing by a woman. The Diary tells the story of 22-year old, Perpetua, a nursing mother, who in the 3rd century defies her father and stands her ground in defense of her faith. According to what we know from the historical records, with her slave Felicitas, who has recently given birth, by her side Perpetua leads a small band of Believers out into the dusty arena of the amphitheater in Carthage, Roman Africa.

The spectators were there for the entertainment. For them it was a combined mini Super Bowl and Circus with live acts. But for the frightened—some wailing, most silently praying—group of condemned men and women it was their date with destiny. There were probably a few entrepreneurs in the crowd selling peanuts and hot dogs, and bookies taking bets on how long the show would last before the wild animals and gladiators accomplished what they were trained to do. It’s a harrowing tale. But as is so often the case, the end of one story folds into the beginning of another.

The power of the so-called ‘butterfly effect’ says tiny changes in conditions such as the flap of a butterfly's wings can affect the weather, thousands of miles away. However, what I’m talking about runs far deeper than the theories of the mathematician and meteorologist, Edward Lorenz or Chaos Theory. For me this is all about Intersections, Opportunities, Divine Appointments, and Influence. Think about the influence of a child with five loaves and two fishes; the lingering of a Samaritan woman by a well; the casual image of an Ethiopian eunuch, who just happens to be sitting in his SUV reading Isaiah, waiting for Philip; and of course the remarkable, not-so-chance, history of this very institution. Everything says, Intersections, Opportunities, Divine Appointments, and Influence.

And what of in your life? Think of how something as simple as a chance encounter at the airport, comment on Facebook or Blackboard, exchange of business cards, or donation to Regent University can have a ripple effect and impact far beyond your wildest dreams. This is better than any investment in the stock market. In a way, Commissioning brings us to a place of flapping wings, where the awesome reality of your future is about to explode in a unique interpretation of “*Christian leadership to change the world?*” And don’t for a minute think that it’s all about knowledge. Orville Wright, the first man to fly, didn’t have a pilot’s license!

As the poet William B. Yeats said: “Education isn’t about filling a bucket, it’s about lighting a fire!” And your flapping wings can fan a flame that will initiate changes for eternity because it was never about you in the first place. It’s not about the size of the seed you sow, but about the
God Who can make it grow. It’s not even about the prayer you pray, but about the greatness of The One Who answers prayer.

And so, I exhort you to use what you have, to make the most of your degree. But don’t fall prey to the blandishments or enticements of worldly knowledge or join the fashionable, concept and construct-spewing brigade. Instead, lay down, forego, set aside, resist some of those rights and privileges and hold fast to your uniqueness in Christ. Cling to the purchased-at-such-a-high-price Identity that says: you’re one-in-a-million, cut from a distinctive Regent cloth and soon to be hood, an ambassador for the Kingdom. Hold fast because you’ve learned in your qualitative or quantitative research methods classes as Einstein said, “Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.” This is the dignity of your calling and it has been the ‘flapping wings’ of Christian influence for generations.

Today, we’re in a beautiful theater. But it could just as easily be an unfriendly market square or a Roman Amphitheater. This is your day and your Commissioning. Enjoy it. But remember the lesson from The Prison Diary of Perpetua and the words of the British wartime Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, who, at another critical, crossroads and commissioning moment in history, said:

“This is not the end. This is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.”

I translate that to say, the past is prologue. You have everything to look forward to. Because, it's not about the size of the seed you sow, or even what you think you know. It’s about The God Who makes it grow.


God Bless you!

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