

Path of Life

*You will show me the path of life,
the fullness of joy in your presence.*

PSALM 16

The path of life is a sinuous system. We want it to be straight and clear. It very seldom is. It is something that unfolds a little at a time while we're living it. We talk about "planning it" and "finding it" but life is much more often discovered in hindsight than it is in vision. More often than not, we do not find life, it finds us. The only question is whether

or not we recognize it and accept it when it comes, whether or not we bring meaning to it and take meaning from it as it is.

Psychologists talk a great deal these days about “alienation,” that feeling of being out of touch with the self, of not knowing exactly what we’re about in life or how we feel about it or what things mean to us as we race always from one place to the next looking for what we want but cannot identify. Social analysts say that alienation began to mark us as a people when the assembly line began to take the place of craft. People bolted steel frames or sorted peaches or cut pants pockets all their lives but never felt the exhilarating sense of creativity that comes with “building a car,” or “growing an orchard,” or “designing a suit of clothes.”

Clearly, it all comes down to finding “the fullness of joy in God’s presence.” Maybe alienation is

*When people
are serving,
life is no longer
meaningless.*

JOHN GARDNER



the sign that we are not a secular culture after all. Maybe, in fact, we are a very spiritual one suffering from the fact that we have been cast adrift of all the props and left to find for ourselves the things that really count in life.

Soul Points...

 Meaning does not come from what we do. It comes from what we are. If we are lovers of beauty, then beauty will fill us all our days. If we are committed to justice, then justice will drive us past all fatigue or failure. If we are devoted to building human community, then we will find meaning in the people whose lives we touch. It's when we are driven by nothing other than our daily schedules that life becomes gray, listless and dour.

 Life happens quickly but the meaning of it comes into focus only slowly, slowly, slowly. The challenge is to keep on asking ourselves what it is.

 Achievement is what we do for ourselves. Meaning comes out of what we do for others.

A wisdom story from oral tradition...

Two disciples, who had become dependent on their teacher, were concerned about what they would do as he grew older and one day died.

The elder, sensing this, drew the disciples near and told them this story:

Once there was a student who was with a teacher for many years. When the teacher felt he was going to die, he wanted to make even his death a lesson.

That night, the teacher took a torch, called his student, and set off with him through the forest. Soon they reached the middle of the woods where the teacher extinguished the torch without an explanation.

“What is the matter?” asked the student.

“The torch has gone out,” the teacher answered and walked on.

“But,” shouted the fearful student, “will you leave me here in the dark?”

“No, I will not leave you in the dark,” returned his teacher’s voice from the sur-

rounding blackness. “I will leave you searching for the light.”

Psalm 16 activity...

Do one creative thing this week—bake a cake, paint a picture, cut a bouquet of flowers—that brings you “fullness of joy.”