



Opportunities for us to Embrace the Situation

By Viola Lifrieri

While reflecting on two readings Acts 28: 16-20, 30-31 and John 21: 20-25, what came to mind was how Paul's confinement mentioned in Acts, and Peter's question to Jesus about John, are experienced today by some, if not all of us.

In the verses from Acts of the Apostles, Paul is confined with a soldier guarding him. Paul states that: ". . . although he had **done nothing** against his people or ancestral customs, he was handed over to Rome **as a prisoner.**"

Paul was confined for **two years**, and we know that at other times he was stoned and persecuted harshly. Paul **did not become despondent** about his imprisonment but believed Jesus' promises never to leave him or forsake him. He believed **so strongly** in Jesus that **nothing** could stop him from proclaiming the Kingdom of God to others.

In fact, while imprisoned, Acts tells us that: ". . . **He received all who came to him** and with complete assurance and **without hindrance** he proclaimed the Kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ." (Paul never saw his confinement as a hindrance.)

I continued to reflect on how circumstances, especially today, with Covid-19 that has changed our lives drastically and prevents us from coming and going as freely as we had before.

This drew my thoughts to thinking about the wonderful people who attend daily mass. I thought about what many have experienced over the years – some have had injuries, health problems, or family crises, and how our everyday lives were suddenly changed. I recall a young lady who had been

attending daily mass who looked like she was about to have her baby almost any moment – and I am sure she had her baby by now! – but just think of the changes that she would be experiencing in her life.

This new baby would be her all-in-all day-after-day a beautiful change in her life, with lots of demands. But, as we compare her situation and those we may have experienced and relate them to Paul's confinement, we find that the freedoms we previously cherished may now be restricted and/or find ourselves facing new challenges.

Did the sudden unexpected changes that affected our lives tend to cause us to become **disgruntled**, or were they actually **opportunities for us to embrace the situation** in which we found ourselves? If we embrace our circumstances and trust in God's promise to remain with us, we will experience the joy of God's faithful presence.

I'd like to share a story about a friend, Ruthie, who has had many challenges in her life, and had a deep love for God and **was always joyful** no matter the suffering or restrictions in her life. She loved God so profoundly and personally, that she would say, "He can put His shoes under my bed anytime."

Although it may sound disrespectful, I would say that her personal relationship with Jesus was as intimate as the bridegroom and the bride described in the Song of Songs in the Old Testament.

This dear friend had many health issues: A heart condition, diabetes, kidney failure, neuropathy, other recurring health problems and a divorced daughter who moved back home with her children so as to provide a loving family environment for them. These were difficult times, but they found strength in the love they had for one another.

I'd like to share just two circumstances that **blew me away** in how God used her, when her life was **ruled by her poor health**.

Ruthie as I said, **was always a jolly person**. This was her **gift** – and confinement could not stop this joyful blessing of God from blessing the lives of others.

When her kidneys had given out, she had to go on dialysis 3 hours a day, 3 times a week. Ruthie always made – as my husband would say, "lemonade out of lemons."

The nurses and technicians who cared for her shared that the 3 hours that she was at the dialysis center 3 times a week, were the most cheerful hours for them and for their patients each week. Ruthie, with her joyful spirit had everyone laughing, giggling, and **invested in making the best of a difficult confining situation**.

There was another occasion when she was in the Hospital. She couldn't sleep and another patient was brought into her semi-private room. Ruthie knew nothing of the woman; and in her special way, talked with the woman. She continued to converse with the lady throughout the night and right into the morning. When the woman's doctor arrived that morning, he was in shock. **Why was he shocked, you might ask? Well, let me tell you!** The woman who had come in during the night had been

brought to the hospital because she had suffered a stroke that affected her ability to speak. When the doctor arrived that morning, the woman was speaking without any difficulty.

My friend, confined to the hospital bed herself, received this woman (like Paul); and with her gift of joy, she was this woman's therapist without knowing it. The woman was made better in speech, but also in her soul.

Jesus was with both of these women, ***right where they were, in a hospital*** because of their physical needs; but ***this did not hinder the purposes*** of God to bless each of them.

Both the Apostle Paul and Ruthie lived their lives as Jesus lived His life. A perfect example of how their lives mirrored Jesus' life is when Jesus prayed to His Father that what he had to endure would be removed, but chose to embrace and surrender to the will of the Father praying: "Abba (Father)!" He said. "Everything is possible for you. Take this cup away from me. ***But let it be as you, not I, would have it.***"

So, maybe we should not act like Peter (who was always stumbling in faith – yet became our first pope – it means there is hope for each of us – especially me). Remember, Peter was caught up in comparing what Jesus was calling him to do and how it differed from how Jesus directed John. Peter asks Jesus: "***What about Him?***" Do ***we*** sometimes look at our situation and ask God why our life can't be like "Mary's, or Joe's or Sue's? Have we ever asked Jesus: "***What about them?***"

If Jesus' response to Peter was, "What if I want Him to remain behind?" – is it possible that Jesus may say something similar to us, such as: "***What if your life is different from theirs?***" "***What concern is it of yours?***"

The Gospel indicates that ***Jesus goes further with His response*** to Peter's question about John. He invites Peter, ***and surely us***, in those moments where we question God, with these words: "***Follow me.***" Jesus is telling Peter, ***and each of us***, that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and there is no other way except for each of us to follow Him – not John, not Mary, or Joe or Sue.

Let us consider that whenever we experience disruptions or obstacles in our everyday lives –whether it is due to health, injuries, family or other unexpected demands, that this ***IS the circumstance in which*** Jesus is calling us to "***Follow Him.***" Jesus, Paul, and Ruthie, by faith, trusted in the Father's promises and embraced His Divine Will for them.

The next time God should ***GRACE YOU OR ME WITH SOME LIFE-CHANGING EVENT***, may He help us recall the blessings that came through Paul and Ruthie's lives. They fully embraced the promises of God to work all things together for good in their lives. There is no mountain too high, nor valley too deep that God is not present to and through His beloved children – they are you and me.

I thank the Holy Spirit who continues to show me how to live like Jesus, Paul and Ruthie trusting God in all circumstances with a joyful heart.

God Bless You!