

To Be Or Not To Be Like the Ostrich

“Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith.”
Habakkuk 2:4

Theodore Hiebert says in the New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary that the above verse expresses an insight nearly the same as that of Wendell Berry in his poem, “Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front.” Namely, *“Be joyful though you have considered all the facts.”*

Both Habakkuk and Berry give us a strange slant on life in a mean-spirited world. When we look at the *proud*, we see that they are oftentimes running the show. The *spirit that is not right within them* may seem demonic. It’s certainly selfish. The proud do it their way and for their benefit. Remember the golden rule? “He who has the gold makes the rule.” Where’s the joy in that for everyone else? Where’s the joy of being left out, treated like a nobody? *Be joyful though you have considered all the facts?* Really?

One way we try to maintain our joy, as well as our sanity, is by not considering all the facts. Be joyful by ignoring the facts. Isn’t ignorance bliss? Isn’t knowing exactly what we’re up against a downer? Don’t think about it. Hide. Be in denial. Do your own thing as often as you can and for as long as you can. Be like the ostrich. Bury your head in the sand.

Actually, what many of us learned as kids isn’t true. The ostrich doesn’t stick its head in the sand to hide. The ostrich buries its head in the sand to turn the eggs that are incubating there with its bill. And it does so for only a short time several times a day because it’s obviously difficult to breathe with your head covered with sand.

So, when a person is ignoring obvious facts in the hopes that by denying the existence of a problem it will go away, we might say that he is burying his head in the sand. But we can’t say this person is being like an ostrich. The ostrich is banking on the future when it sticks its bill into the sand. It is tending to the next generation of its family, eggs that will grow up and live in a predator-filled world.

According to Berry, better than burying our heads in the sand is to consider all the facts, know what we and others are up against. How can we best make decisions and take action and receive God’s grace if we don’t know what we’re fighting? And given that *“If God is for us, who can be against us”*, can we not be joyful as opposed to letting our situation get us down? Have faith in God, about whom Jesus says, *“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”* Lk 12:32

Some young people today misuse the word “awesome.” Everything is awesome in their vocabulary. Clearly, if everything is awesome then nothing is awesome. The world is awe-full. But to have faith in God in a mean-spirited world dominated by the proud, or to be joyful even though we have considered all the facts, is worthy of the word. And by God’s grace, possible.

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