Elliott Thinksheets

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Dear Leona,

For your birthday, I tried to write a poem but it turned to mush. It began this way:

I read in Jonathan Swift today
that nobody wants to be old.
But he also said, as I'm sure I've read,
that nobody wants to be told
that you can't have long life,
which everybody wants,
if you want never to be old.
O Lord of logic,
since my wantings knock each other out,
help me to want what you want,

or what's the Bible for?

Being almost a decade younger than you, I can't know whether, when I'm your age, I'll be as lonely as you complain of being. But today I pondered loneliness & came up with these thoughts: (1) The Bible has little to say about loneliness. Apparently the writers had too keen a sense of the presence of God to be lonely. Hebrew has two words for lonely, but only one is in the Bible; & it deals with the fact of separation rather than the feeling of loneliness. E.g., Ps.4.9 CEV says "I can lie down and sleep soundly because you, LORD, will keep me safe [because alone, undisturbed]." Greek? It has only one word for loneliness, & it's not used in the NT or other early Christian literature. The word for a lonely place is used often: Jesus withdraws to a lonely place (Mt.14.13; L.4.42), goes out to a lonely place (M.1.35; L.5.16). Lots about the deserted, little about being deserted except Jesus' momentary feeling of God-abandonment, which was not real loneliness because it was God-centered: abandoned *by God*. (The one reference in early Christian literature is 2 Clement 2.3: "Our [Christian] people seemed to be deserted by God, but now we who have believed have become many more....") (2) Jesus says he was left alone, abandoned by his disciples; but "I am not alone, because the Father is with me" (Jn.16.32).

Hymns? No hymnal I have has "Loneliness" in its index. But I thought of one of the truly great hymns in Christian history when I tune in to the feeling of loneliness, though I seldom do. Here it is, an early Greek Christian hymn: "Art thou weary, art thou languid, / art thou sore distressed? / 'Come to me,' said One, 'and coming, / be at rest.' // Hath he marks to lead me to him, / if he be my guide? / In his feet and hands are wound-prints, / and his side. // Is there diadem as monarch, / that his brow adorns? / Yea, a crown in very surety, / but of thorns. // If I ask him to receive me, / will he say me nay? / Not till earth and not till heaven / pass away. // Finding, foll'wing, keeping, struggling, / is he sure to bless? / Saints, apostles, prophets, martyrs, / answer YES!"

Though aloneness is not good for us (Gn.2.18; Ps.68.6), it's sometimes necessary (Ps.38.11; 2 Tim.4.16). And it may be an aid to communion (Ex.24.2), meditation (Jn.6.15), prayer (L.9.18), and thanksgiving (Deut.6.10).

God bless you, Leona, this & every day.

This was not intended as a Thinksheet, but--as it's what I've to say about ***elderly LONELINESS***--why not?

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