

THE OLD MAN AND HIS CANE

By John F. Hall

When I was 17, I heard a song called, “That Lonesome Valley.” It was recorded in 1925 by the Jenkins Family. These are the lyrics to that song: “You’ve got to walk that lonesome valley. You’ve got to walk that lonesome valley, you gotta walk it by yourself, nobody can walk it for you, you gotta walk it by yourself. There’s a road that leads to glory through a valley far away, nobody can walk it for you, they can only point the way. Mama and daddy loves you dearly, sister does and brother, too, they may beg you go with them, but they cannot go for you. I’m gonna walk that lonesome valley, I’m gonna walk it by myself, don’t want nobody to walk it for me, I’m gonna walk it by myself. Some people say that John was a Baptist, some folks say that he was a Jew, but holy scripture tells you that he was a preacher too. Daniel was a Bible hero, was a prophet in a den of lions, proved what faith can do.”

Now, 62 years later, I’m a frail old man. I have to use a cane to help maintain my balance, as I walk towards my darkest valley. I’m reminded of the words found in Psalms, Chapter 23, Verse 4: “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.” My darkest valley is in the chronic pain and suffering, that I have endured, from five compression fractures in my spine, from my spinal stenosis, from rheumatoid arthritis, from osteoarthritis, and from Sjogren’s disease, not to mention some of the other things that torment me. Jesus Christ walked that darkest valley, when he spent 40 days and 40 nights, in the Judean desert, fasting and in prayer. An anonymous person wrote a poem called, “Lonesome Valley.” These are that person’s words: “You got to walk that lonesome valley, you got to go there by yourself, ain’t nobody here can go there for you, you got to go there for yourself. If you cannot preach like Peter, if you cannot pray like Paul, you can tell the love of Jesus, you can say He died for all. Your mother’s got to walk that lonesome valley, she’s got to go there by herself, ain’t nobody else can go there for her, she’s got to go there by herself. Your father’s got to walk that lonesome valley, he’s got to go there by himself, ain’t nobody else can go there for him, he’s got to go there by himself. Your brother’s got to walk that lonesome valley, he’s got to go there by himself, ain’t nobody else can go there for him, he’s got to go there by himself.”

I’ve seen older people that seem to be depressed, isolated, and lonely. Some I know, are that way because of the loss of a spouse. Others might be miserable because they had to give up their-long-time home. Even some younger adults feel anxious and lonely, because they feel unable to express themselves. They feel that they do not matter to others, and are not understood. They love their smartphones, and their social media, but such things cannot love them back.

My son, John, told me that he was going to get a haircut. I asked him to check with our long-time barber, Jerry Stroud, to see if he would be cutting hair the following day. He called Jerry on his cell phone, and Jerry told him that he had hip replacement surgery. Jerry said that he would be recovering for a while. Jerry’s dad was a Kentucky State Trooper like me. Sadly, his dad died of

colon cancer when he was in his mid 40's. I asked my son to locate us another barber in Cadiz. My son checked with his friend, Tom Patterson. Tom told him that he gets his hair cut at the Cuts & Curls. Mary, the owner, cuts his hair for \$10.00. And he said that she does a good job. So my son decided to let her cut his hair. He said she was fast and she did a good job. I decided to drive to her salon. It is located on Main Street, in a log cabin house. The house is across the street and just west of the Sonic drive-in restaurant. My hair was looking rather unkept. Mary, established the business 15 years ago. I was very pleased with the hair cut that she gave me. She was very courteous and respectful of this old man, when I hobbled in, using my cane.

I have to use a cane when I'm out. When you see me, slowly walking, you may wonder what I am thinking. Maya Angelo wrote a poem called, "On Aging." These are her words: "When you see me sitting, like a sack left on a shelf, don't think I need your chatter. I'm listening to myself. Hold! Stop! Don't pity me! Hold! Stop your sympathy! Understand if you got it, otherwise I'll do without it! When my bones are stiff and aching, and my feet won't climb the stair, I only ask for one favor: Don't bring me no rocking chair. When you see me walking, stumbling, don't study and get it wrong. 'Cause tired don't me lazy and every goodbye ain't gone. I'm the same person I was back then, a little less hair, a little less chin, a lot less lungs and much less wind. But ain't I lucky I can still breathe in."

I believe that less than five percent of people are mean spirited. In 1969, Bobby Austin and Curt Sapaugh wrote the song, "Try A Little Kindness." These are some of their lyrics: "If you see your brother standing by the road, with a heavy load from the seeds he sowed; and if you see your sister falling by the way, just stop and say, "You're going the wrong way." You've got to show a little kindness. Yes, show a little kindness. Just shine your light for everyone to see. And if you try a little kindness, then you'll overlook the blindness, of the narrow-minded people on the narrow-minded street. Don't walk around the down and out. Lend a helping hand instead of doubt. And the kindness that show every day, will help someone along their way." I'll end this story with the words written by Robert Louis Stevenson. He wrote: "Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap but by the seeds that you sow." My stories are my seeds, that I sow, as I walk, with my cane, on life's broken byways.

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