

A Time to Hit-the-Bricks

Sooner or Later bad luck hits us all.
- Ecclesiastes 9

It does happen, doesn't it? Bad luck, as sometimes called, is as certain as death; but less certain, is whether our view or assessment of this so-called luck is really bad. Maybe our view(s) have been distorted or all together distracted by the opinion or influence of others. If we lie in a hospital bed with much hope of surviving a near-death experience, a dying patient next to us may influence our self as in good standing; with the *tables turned* however, the assessment is bad – and may be very bad depending on the anticipated suffering and the pronounced end of the life as we know it.

Recently, I read that nothing happens by accident in the life of one who truly believes in Christ as Savior; that all things are by design and for a purpose in our sovereign Lord. Believing that to be true, I still wrestle with the notions and opinions of bad luck, misfortune and ill-fate. If nothing is an accident, and God loves his children like no other, how can such events by names given above, affect us as bad? On such a thought, I begin my walk; a walk that has become routine – even necessary – to talk about this and that, to pray, and to meditate on this “luck” or by any other name. Call it hitting-the-bricks, but all I know is that my walks are worth much to



me; and so I begin one step after another and than another – all the while believing that if only for the physical exercise, it does me good; but maybe there is more to it.

“Hit-the-bricks” is usually associated with an enforced exit – such as from a job or other relationship; it is a kind of directive or ultimatum interpreted as “get-out...don't come back...I never want to see your face again...” Similar in form is “pound-the-pavement” – but that may be associated with hard work, due-diligence, or something similar. For me, either expression can be applied to walking with purpose and intent; walking because you can – and even must – as a matter of resting your mind and coming to some peace if only by the last step of the route. Whether for the simple pleasure of physical exercise, or something more explained by the physician or therapist, a walk is my way of working-out the mind as much as the body. So to begin (or end) the day, I must walk – I must hit-the-bricks

or pound-the-pavement; so that if nothing more positive can be said of the day, I have walked – and walk I have...and will, always.

This practice began some years ago with my children: as infants and tots, a walk meant a stroll or – at times – the tow of child-on-back...a child backpack of sort. This handy device – a spin-off of age old custom – was an aluminum frame designed for the tot. Not the infant variety that fits naturally at the stomach, but the more fatherly-type that puts the young at eye level just to the back with small arms free to move about and legs naturally at the carrier's hips. Whoever gave us this handy device should know that I gave it lots of service, and credit it as the convenience to spur on my walks and take the little ones along for the ride.

Of course these parental walks did not always fare well for introspection and meditation; but most were the dutiful type that left me frequently tending to the child – or children – but nevertheless satisfied by the bare necessities that render a parent both warranted and overwrought at the same time. Tending to the nest – to use a natural association for this effort – was necessary at home and on these walks with more or less effort. Yet, I was glad that I could walk, could enjoy the neighborhood or a nearby trail, and could even do so with added effort to care for these small figures of myself, of us and of them.

When I was that small, a favorite expression was “ho-chee-me” – which meant, hold-me or, more accurately, carry me. This was my plea – mixed with tears if necessary – to be carried rather than have to walk. Call me lazy or just a baby, but the plea apparently worked at times and – as I have been reminded on occasion – left a lasting mark (or should I say remark) on me. My own children probably had a similar plea – though not with a mark like that one; and, if I was sensitive to that expressed need – or want – would dutifully pick them up and carry them for some length subject to their or my will. We walked, carried or pulled by wagon; with one or more, we hit-the-bricks and pounded-the-pavement with little on no thought of the opportunity, the privilege, and the purpose to do so.

Brick and pavement is hard – as it should be – with strength enough to support much more weight than the points of a couple of feet, a stroller, or things of that sort; yet, it most often has been the surface of my enduring exploits. Thanks to the modern age and any number of rubberized footwear, the hardness seems to be of little consequence or sensitivity against the tread of moderately priced shoes or boots. Still, I prefer the shoulder

of the road or the softer ground of earth – dirt, grass or sand – where a more natural setting often surrounds the path. In such places is less traffic and more terrace from which a glance or gaze may lead to a thought or story; but at the least, may free me from the possibility of an inattentive car and in turn set my mind on other things beyond that which may instantly bring harm or even death.

Brick or not, hardness is beyond the surface of my trail; but is sometimes the effort of simply putting one leg in front of the other. Walking is something that most of us have been afforded from our childhood and, though we may know how and be able, don't always want to walk; we don't always want to put one leg in front of the other and make the effort to push forward – even if it physically brings us back to the start. Like my experience as a child, “ho-chee me” is my plea; for to walk can carry a hardness well beyond that of the surface or material; it can lead us to the realm of thought and meditation whereby the hardness is with our wills, our wants and our ways that, if tapped, will never return us to the start but lead us somewhere beyond.

A few paces into this walk, and I begin to pray – not because I necessarily want to but because I know that I must. Giving thanks is far more difficult than prayers of intercession because I sense that something is always there to thwart my thankfulness – to leave me with a prevailing wanting or even gnawing of dissatisfaction and discontent. To feel this way seems to only further my insincerity as I begrudgingly voice the words in mind and than mouth if possible. My hardness of will is to argue and to justify my feelings – which I can do with far less effort and reluctance; yet I know that such feelings will vary and on rare occasion seem nonexistent. The feelings come and go but, as for faith, I know that it should come, and with each walk, come more.

On the softer surface(s) is the better place for some control (or distraction) over these feelings – as I am less familiar with the trail and therefore, more attentive to what lies ahead, or below. As mentioned before, the ventures offers a private terrace with the remote possibility of seeing a soaring bird or a rodent scurrying about; on rare occasions, I come across deer, fox, beaver, feral pigs, coyotes, gators, and turkey. Living near (and walking on) a once-military post has given the unique opportunity to see most of these animals that, at times, seem tame enough to eat from your hand – or least to pay little attention to your presence.

Besides the excitement and wonder of such wildlife sightings is the shear (and sometimes assumed) beauty of the land be it the foothills of the Appalachian or the Low country of the southeastern Atlantic coast. The slight but noticeable hues that result from the sunlight on facets of foothills is a vivid and memorable view that gives rise to assignment of the color blue; but Fall stands premier with the mosaic of color across the ban of hardwood and evergreen. Least favorite of these seasons is the over extended Summer months, where all manner of pestilence can reek havoc on the walker – taking more than one bite out of his flesh and the serenity of his walk. Most favorite is the dead of winter when the stillness has more than enough space from which one's thoughts expand to the realization that being alone is not loneliness; but the opportunity to audible your prayers, your mind, and yes – even the honest but less redeemable feelings of my will, my wants and my ways.

Only when I have become familiar with the softer surfaces can the thoughts begin to venture; prior to that, I am busy looking here-and-there to assure my footing and my bearing – if the need be necessary on such a short trip. As for hard surfaces of brick and pavement; well, the walk is almost guaranteed to encounter a variety of feelings intermixed with prayer and saving thoughts. The matter of “luck” being one such thought – or an endless stream of thoughts – I still wrestle with the events and circumstances conveniently coined as bad. If nothing is an accident, than such was purposed to happen; and, whether bad or good in some assessment, was or is meant for good, right? But if meant for good, than why does it seem humanly bad...and make me feel bad? In this honest expression is the natural desire (and possibly drive) to end this episode, to move beyond, and to find yet more trails free from the hardness, replete with softness in distractions of beauty or risks. Anything but this same old walk along paths of hardness, full of routine and predictability of feelings that wrestle and conflict with that which I claim to believe and live.

Today, I will take yet another walk on the hard surface; yet, I believe that these notions of the matter of “luck” need to be examined further by the basic desire to walk and to put one leg in front of the other. I don't always like the result – and even the process leading up to it; but if walking is the means possible, than I will walk with it as I may.