

to the creation of our own nature, and to the creation of our own person. And this is the result. Thanks to our reconciliation in Christ the voice of God in nature and the voice of God in our conscience obtain a different sound. They increase in clearness and in significance. And by the opened ear they are heard with a clarity which blends the life of grace with the life of nature in glorious harmony and turns the whole world, and all history including our own lives, into one Mighty revelation of the Father, whom we worship in the face of his Son.

57

“I AM CONTINUALLY
WITH THEE.”

We may sit for hours by the side of a person and hold no fellowship with him. In long railway journeys we may spend several days in the company of others, and not so much as learn their names, or know anything about them. On the other hand we may be miles apart from a friend, and be continually engaged with him, so that we scarcely think of anything but of him, and in spirit enjoy closest fellowship with his spirit. It may sound strangely, but such is the fact. A mother who has lost her darling child was never so closely united in soul with the soul of her child as during the first hours after death, when the little one went far away from her.

Fellowship of soul with soul may be greatly aided by personal presence, facial expression and mutual exchange of thoughts, but is not dependent upon them. In close fellowship of soul with soul

we crave personal presence. Human nature consists of soul and body, and is only fully satisfied when fellowship of soul with soul is accompanied by physical presence. In the realm of glory, communion with God's saints will only be made perfect by the sight of one another in the glorified body. Fellowship among the redeemed in the Fatherhouse above, bears a provisional character until the resurrection, and awaits perfection in the return of Jesus. But however deeply significant personal presence and sight may be, presence of soul with soul does not depend on it. As God created us we are able, though separated in the body, to have close fellowship one with the other, either by writing, telephone or telegraphy, and also apart from all this, in a purely spiritual way in feeling, perceptions, thoughts and imagination. Personal presence alone does not afford human fellowship; for this is always fellowship of spirit with spirit, of soul with soul, of heart with heart. And the question whether we live near by a person or far away from him is not answered by distance or proximity but only and alone by spiritual nearness or estrangement. When parting from a loved one for a long term of years, even also at the last farewell before dying, we can assure him: "I shall continually be with you." And many a mother with reference to her child, and many a widow with reference to her late husband, have literally fulfilled it. The child, the husband were gone from the earth, but fellowship continued, unseen, awaiting the re-union.

When Asaph sings in Ps. 73:23 "Nevertheless I am continually with Thee" it can only be taken in the sense of this spiritual fellowship. Locally

we are never separated from God. We can not be anywhere and God not be near. He besets us behind and before. Whither shall we go from his Spirit, whither shall we flee from his presence. We can not escape the presence of God. "If I make my bed in hell," sings David, Ps. 139. "behold Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me," God is never away from us. He can not be away from us, neither can we be away from Him. He is the Omnipresent One. And his almighty power is operative every moment in every pulse-beat of the blood, in every quiver of the nerves, and in every breath we draw.

But this Divine Omnipresence does not constitute fellowship of our spirit with the Spirit of God. Two things are necessary for this. First that God makes his approach to our spirit and reveals to us the tokens of his holy presence within; and again, that our spirit opens itself to the Spirit of God, allows him to come in, goes out toward him, and in seeking him will not rest until it finds him. The approach of the Spirit of God to our spirit may impart a mere superficial impression, and no more. In this sense there is scarcely anyone who at sometime or other in his life has not been aware of a certain impulse from God in the soul. This has been perceived in the midst of sin. It is different, however, when the Lord God discloses himself to us, makes himself known, taking up his abode in the soul, and announces himself as the secret friend of the heart. Then alone the secret walk with God becomes

possible, and He is sovereign to grant his fellowship to the soul or to withhold it. Let him who received it, therefore, take thought, that thereby he was granted a privilege above all other privileges, a royal, heavenly and Divine grace of highest worth. And that we take this blessedness at this high worth will be evident from the fact, whether we in turn unlock our heart to the Eternal, and, not once in a while, but continuously, seek to enjoy this inward, secret fellowship with God.

In the song of Asaph in hand the word "continually" must be taken in its literal sense; not from time to time; not once in a while; but continuously all the time without ceasing. He had enjoyed the blessedness of fellowship with God, but at intervals, from time to time. For a while he lived "near unto God," and for a while he was away from God, and thereby his soul had erred. He felt that he had wandered off, and that he had been at the point of becoming unfaithful to God's children. From this maelstrom he only found deliverance when he returned to the sanctuary of God and opened his soul again to Divine fellowship. This bitter experience of soul led him to change his course. Not as had been his habit, to seek fellowship with God in the midst of all sorts of distractions, and then to wander away again from him, but from now on, continually, all the time, without resting and without ceasing to be with God. (Dutch version: "I will then continually be with Thee"). Not from now on to be absorbed in holy meditation in order through the imagination, representation and deep mysticism to lose himself in fellow-

ship with the Divine Being. For though, provided it is applied with utmost care, such losing of oneself in spiritual vision of the Infinite, as result of private prayer, can have a value of its own. It is not what continually being "near unto God" implies. It can not mean this because in holy, mystical meditation the other operations of our spirit are arrested, with this result, that we stand helpless in the face of our work in the world, so that nothing can come of doing God's will, while on the contrary, close fellowship with God must become actual in the full and vigorous revelation of our life. It must permeate and give color to our feeling, perceptions, sensations, thoughts, imagination, purposes, acts and words. It must not stand as a foreign factor by the side of our life, but be the glow that casts its sheen upon our whole existence. This can not be so with fellowship of man with man, but only with the fellowship with God, because in and from and to God are the issues of all holy and of all creaturely utterances of life.

Asaph did not aim therefore at inactive meditation, but at a fundamental tone, a fundamental temper of mind and heart, which continually lifts itself in praise and directs itself in prayer, to God. An ejaculatory prayer is not enough. It proceeds only occasionally from the soul. While the requirement is, that at all times our expectation in everything be from God, and that our thanks are continually his due; to let God inspire us and so to deal with our faithful Father that it would at no time affect us strangely if He were to appear to us. Even as we have our self ever with us, and bring

it into every interest of life, so we should allow the thought of God, the lifting up of the soul to God, the faith on, and the love for, God unceasingly to operate in and with everything. . . This prevents estrangement, and straying away, and accustoms the soul to be continually "near unto God." This is shown most forcibly by the fact that he who so lives is at once aware of an aching void within, the moment he wanders away from God, which allows him no rest till fellowship with God is restored.

58

"I HIDE ME WITH THEE."

The hen allows her chickens to run about freely within her sight until danger threatens, and then at once with raised wings, she clucks her brood towards herself, and does not rest until the last little one has crowded itself beneath her wings, and animal-mother faithfulness covers all the young innocents. But then the chickens do not hide themselves yet with the mother hen. They only do this when, seeing the approach of danger, of themselves, and of their own initiative, they flee to the mother hen in order to seek protection beneath her wings.

The "Jerusalem, Jerusalem," which Jesus declaimed against Zion was doubly upbraiding in its touching pathos, because it reproached Israel either for not surmising danger, or in case it did, for seeking defense and cover with men and not with God. In time of danger the people should have called upon God, and should have poured out their supplication for help and deliverance unto the God of their fathers, and as soon as