

sharper focus “He walked into the forest”

By Lawrence Shiroma Major

And he shall be like a tree, planted by the rivers of water (Ps. 1:3a).

I recently read that longtime Alaskan Salvationist, Clarence Jackson, 78, Tlingit Eagle tribal leader of the Tsaagweidí—or Killer Whale Clan—quietly “Walked Into the Forest.” This Alaska Native euphemism for death resonated in my heart, for it evoked an imagery of walking into a forest and leaving behind all that was a part of one’s earthly life.

Scripture promises us that Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him (1 Cor. 2:9 NKJV). More than once during times of personal reflection have I pondered about the ever-nearer future to come, now that I’m a bit closer to it than when I was in my 40s and 50s. It was when I turned 60 that my thoughts began to dwell upon the mortality and the fragility of life. My brother Richard, was lost at sea at the age of 61. My dad James, died of cancer at the age of 69, and my mother Daisy, passed away several years ago at the age of 86.

But we have the lives of others in Scripture to encourage us along our way, like Queen Esther, who, when faced with a difficult, life-threatening situation, cried out, “If I perish, I perish” (Est. 4:16). We have the unwavering determination of our Lord and Savior who, when at the Garden of Gethsemane just prior to his arrest, prayed “Father, if you will, take this cup of suffering away from me. Not my will however, but your will be done” (Luke 22:42 GNB). Our cup of suffering may come to us in a number of ways before we undertake that final Walk in the Forest but as the Psalmist proclaimed, The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? (Ps. 27:1).

Lt. Colonel Victor Newbould said, “None of us are immune from the burdens of life.” In other words, loneliness, frustration, guilt, isolation, failure and discouragement are all a part and parcel of life, but Jesus is our great “burden bearer” to help us through difficult times. I know my feet have faltered many times along the pathway of duty. I have let others down and have felt unworthy and inadequate, but during seasons of dryness, when all seemed lost, the Word of God has been my source of comfort



and solace.

In a beautiful ceremony some years ago during an Alaska Congress in Juneau, Clarence Jackson adopted me into the Killer Whale Clan. Looking back at that experience, I can only marvel at how God allowed my life's journey to briefly come alongside that of this godly Tlingit Eagle tribal leader.

Lord, help me to be like a tree, planted by the rivers of water (Ps. 1:3a), trusting and relying upon you in all that I do and say, and let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer (Ps. 19:14).

Have you made preparations for that final walk into the forest?