

1 PETER 5:7-9

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. ⁸ Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

There is nothing like the community of camaraderie for instilling courage and endurance in an individual. Whether it be a long and dangerous pilgrimage or an ordeal of torture and death, human beings fare much better in a group. When sharing an experience with others our focus naturally turns to the group in which we find identity, value, accountability and encouragement. We experienced this when my wife was going through the ordeal of cancer. She read that when you are suffering, go and find someone who is in worse shape than you are and minister to them, and you will be encouraged. The theory was proven correct in practice.

The practice of predators, be they animals, humans, or even spirits, is to isolate and destroy. I can still vividly remember from childhood an episode from the TV program, "Wild Kingdom" in which a lion was stalking a herd of zebra. The lion locked in on a zebra that was slightly apart from the herd and then made its move. What it did was separate the animal from the group, run it down and kill it. Likewise, when men want to breakdown prisoners they place them in solitary confinement or torture them alone. Spiritually we are at our most vulnerable when we try to be solo Christians. How often have you experienced disturbing doubts and anxiety when lying alone in bed late at night? Contrast that experience with participation in corporate worship.

This sense of communal comfort is increased both by the number of members in the group and the authority of the members. This authority comes from two places. One is the spiritual (or even worldly) status of our comrade. The second is the authority of the one who has already experienced the ordeal and arrived on the other side. For the Christian we have the comrade of ultimate authority on both grounds. God, who has promised to be with us, is the sovereign God of the universe and the one ,who in Jerusalem 2000 years ago suffered more than we will ever suffer and rose to new life. We are not alone. In this life, the Christian life, we are to stick with the herd and follow our Leader, Jesus.

Keep me ever faithful Lord Christ through the experience of your presence with me in this life and my continued participation in the community of believers. Amen.