

## Of Endings

In February I entered the sixty-first year of my age. I have passed by one year the three score part of the Psalmist's measurement: "The years of our life are threescore and ten," which "come to an end like a sigh."

I am considering endings. *Blessed* endings, let me assure you, and thereby the wholeness of things. For a blessed ending is never an interruption. It is, rather, the rounding of the fullness of one's life. The blessed ending announces, without anguish but with the convictions of Christ, "*Consummatum est*": the whisper of the Savior in our innermost ear, "It is, you know, my dear one, finished." And so, at the word of the Lord, it is.

Finished. Made complete. And by its ending rendered whole. Fulfilled. Filled up. Ahhhh.

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Such blessings are not reserved for the old alone. Even the girlchild who meets her ending young is not different from an old man dying; for both lives are made equally *whole* by the call of the King of Heaven.

Both the girl-child and the old man have completed their earthly pilgrimages, each in her and his own way—though they are more similar than not. It isn't the length of life that distinguishes us, but the life itself.

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The beginnings and the endings of the faithful are the same: we come from the Eden of our mothers' wombs. Will we, nill we, there is no help for it: all children next are sent from Eden to make an earthly pilgrimage toward the highest shrine of all. We walk. We wind through the terrible and marvelous complexities of this human existence. We stop at ten times ten thousand places on the way. These *become* the journey. All our stoppings become all our memories, and memory is the map of all our previous days, and that map for each of us is the shape of our individual lives. It is what we have been and what we are.

But at some point, early or late, at some point for all the faithful, our various ways and all our myriad faces are set upon the single most perfect ending of this earthly pilgrimage: Jerusalem.

We, with Abraham, "look forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God." With all our wandering ancestors we confess that we are "strangers and pilgrims on earth." We desire a better country than the ones which we have left behind, a better country than all the countries of this earth, that is, a heavenly one: Jerusalem, that city without a temple, for its temple is the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb.

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"The years of our life are threescore and ten," says the writer of the ninetieth Psalm, adding, "or even by reason of strength, fourscore!" Unaware of the sciences and the medicines of this latter age, the Psalmist puts our limits at seventy years. Nor is seventy an unreasonable figure for

the great majority of the peoples. But my father has already reached his eighty-fifth year, my mother her eighty-fourth. And my wife's parents lived into their nineties. *Or even fourscore!*

There is among us the chance of serious longevity.

A few more experiences of human complexities, then. Another thousand stopping places, to be sure. But it would be foolish to demand those extra years, and perilous to *depend* upon them.

I depend upon the promises of my Redeemer, Jesus.

Therefore I contemplate my personal ending without fear or despair, but with a happy gratitude and in the dearest trust.

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For having seen the ending of my pilgrimage (it is but a stone's throw ahead of me), and having recognized my destination and all my conclusions as Jerusalem the Golden, I am already at peace.

At peace, then, I'm free to review the pilgrimage itself and all the places where I stopped along the way.

At peace, dear friends, I am also at sweet liberty to tell the stories of these stoppings: confessing sins where I have sinned; announcing glory where I have been blinded; touching upon the human relationships we all experience, and the various ages at which we experience them; and, under the tutelage of Rabbi Jesus, offering some instruction to others regarding our common complexities.

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