

Don't Borrow Trouble ~ February 27, 2011

Isaiah 49:8-16a; I Corinthians 4:1-5; Matthew 6:24-34; Psalm 131

I have shared a reading known as the “Desiderata” with you in the past but it always bears repeating. On the best of weeks I read it over every day. The wise words of this reflective piece are the following:

Go placidly amid the noise and haste and remember what peace there may be in silence. As far as possible, without surrender be on good terms with all persons. Speak your truth quietly and clearly; and listen to others, even the dull and ignorant; they too have their story.

Avoid loud and aggressive persons, they are vexations to the spirit. If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain and bitter; for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself. Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans.

Keep interested in your own career, no matter how humble, it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time. Exercise caution in your business affairs; for the world is full of trickery. But let this not blind you to what virtue there is; many persons strive for high ideals; and everywhere life is full of heroism.

Be yourself. Especially, do not feign affection. Neither be cynical about love; for in the face of all aridity and disenchantment it is as perennial as the grass.

Take kindly the counsel of the years, gracefully surrendering the things of youth. Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune. But do not distress yourself with imaginings. Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness. Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself.

You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here. And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.

Therefore be at peace with God, whatever you conceive Him to be, and whatever your labors and aspirations, in the noisy confusion of life keep peace with your soul.

With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world. Be careful. Strive to be happy.

This meditation seems to have two sources. It is attributed to Max Ehrmann but it is also claimed that it was found in Old Saint Paul's Church in Baltimore, dated 1692. Its true source is as yet unknown. But, it certainly sums up our scripture readings for this morning, especially that from The Sermon on the Mount from the Gospel of Matthew.

The Sermon on the Mount is full of wisdom. This week it reminds us not to distress ourselves with imaginings and not to borrow trouble from tomorrow—today's problems are enough to deal with today.

I often tell people, who come to talk to me about their concerns, to handle one thing at a time, one day at a time, one stress at a time. I ask if they think they can make it through the day at hand. Almost all tell me “Of course, I can.” And they can. I have to tell myself this from time to time when I am waiting to see how some problem will be worked out. Most often there is a solution, one that becomes clearer with the dawning of a new day. I have also found that it is much easier to untie one knotty problem in life at a time. We become too scattered when we

force our minds in too many directions at once, when we look for trouble when it does not even exist. When we do this, we become very muddled and nothing is resolved.

Often we worry about things that never come to be. We forget that we only have the present moment in life and we are to focus on that. When we become too concerned about what might happen to us, we may become paralyzed with fear causing us the inability to grow and move forward in life. We need to remember that we are children of the universe, children of God and life is unfolding as it should all around us. We simply need to get our priorities in order and decide what it is that is most important and meaningful to us. It is never too late to reflect on our lives and rediscover what is most vital. When we learn this, we are to work to preserve the highest value by pursuing a worthy goal. For us, as Christians, that goal is establishing the Kingdom of God among us in this world.

In the Kingdom of God, justice and peace will rule, kindness and love will be in the forefront, patience and mercy will be practiced by all. Material possessions will not be uppermost in our hearts and minds. God will provide all that we may need, just as God provides for the lilies of the field.

This doesn't mean that we should bumble our way through life without ever considering the future. We are to plan but we are not to worry about things when we need to adapt to a new reality. Everything changes and we need to be able to move with every transition. If we stop being flexible, we stop living. If we close ourselves off from new experiences in life, we miss a lot. Life is very short and we need to try to live it to the fullest extent.

Paul reminds us that our goal is to be servants of God and stewards of all that has been given us. We are to use all of life wisely. When we are able to do this we improve the world around us and make life better for all. He didn't want those who read his letters to be distracted from their purpose by all that surrounded them. He believed that the small band of followers he had helped discover the life and teachings of Jesus had a very brief time to accomplish much before the return of their Teacher. He believed that Jesus would come during their lifetimes and take them to himself. He encouraged and supported them through their struggles. He tried to help them, and us, grasp what was needed to have fulfillment in life. Some understood, some didn't. Those who did, taught the next generation our faith.

And so it goes on to this day. We try to teach those in our care the ways of Christ. Growing up in this time and culture is a difficult task. There is so much pressure on our children. More than was ever on us. Helping them learn what needs the proper emphasis in life takes a lot of effort and consistency. Helping them understand that they are safely in God's hands no matter what may befall them is tricky, because they find it easy to believe in tangible things and struggle with things they cannot see or feel. Growth into our faith is a slow process. More complete understanding of the way God works, often does not come until we are mature and, sometimes even not then. God moves in a mysterious way for each of us. God never forgets God's humans; we are written on the palms of God's hands.

We need to remember to be at peace with God, whatever we conceive God to be, and in the noisy confusion of life, during those times when we are tempted to borrow trouble from tomorrow and become lost in its complications, we need to keep peace with our souls. Then, as always, all will be well.

-- Amen