

## **Making the Best of Things**

**Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7; II Timothy 2:8-15, Luke 17:11-19; Psalm 111 10-14-07**

I know we all have heard the expression, “If life gives you lemons, make lemonade.” Some of us lead very charmed lives and have not done a lot of lemonade making, while others of us are probably certain we could supply the town of Colebrook, or even the entire state of Connecticut, with large glasses of the stuff. It seems we are always confronted with one trying experience after another and if we lose our perspective on life and our senses-of-humor, things can turn sour in a big hurry. It is tough to make the best of things that are all wrong, but if we have faith that somehow things will right themselves again, we can make it through whatever life throws at us. And there are times, after we have made it through periods of great disappointment and angst that we find ourselves altered in a way we might not have expected during the struggle. Jane Stuart wrote, “All sorts of spiritual gifts come through privations if they are accepted.”

The author of the Second Letter to Timothy was pointing to just such a belief. Traditionally Paul is credited with this letter but scholars have decided that the style and thoughts in it are not typical of his authentic writings. That does not matter at all—what does is what this letter still says to us. And it says, “Keep going no matter what adversity may befall you, as I have done. Remember why we have been called to serve God in the way we have, to help others find the pathway of Christ and to stick to it. The best teacher there is, is our example.”

Tremendous growth in faith and endurance can come through struggle if we can manage to step back and take a good look at where we are and where we have been in our lives.

I remember keeping a daily journal some years back during a time of very intense struggle and terribly dark nights of the soul. I never re-read it when I was first writing it, but some time later, after much of the distress and turmoil had passed, I picked it up again and looked through it. I was amazed at where I had been and where I had come to be. Even the handwriting in it reflected my intense despair and fear. It was difficult to read but I also came to see that, while I was no longer in that place and having passed through that particular fire, I was a stronger person. While it is said that God will only give us as much as we can handle, when we are going through a terrible time we often do not believe it. However, I learned that might be true. Just when it seemed I would be at a breaking point, someone or something would come along to relieve some of the pressure.

As you all know, I often think in music and my favorite song line in those days, following this difficulty was “I made it through the rain and found myself respected by the others who, got rained on, too, and made it through.” That did not mean that there would be no more rainy days ahead, there have been and probably will be. And I have squeezed a lot of lemons and produced more lemonade than I care to think about.

We learn a great deal from the way we handle what happens to us. We can run away and hide or we can stand firm and face whatever it is that threatens to drag us down. This takes a measure of courage and faith.

Just the kind Jeremiah urged those in exile to have as they faced an uncertain future. “Choose life,” he urged them, “in the difficult situation in which you find yourselves. Carry on and do not be discouraged for you will be taken from bondage and set free, perhaps, not you, but your children or their children. The time will come when all will be restored to you.” This message of salvation through God is the one of the threads that runs throughout the Bible and that ties lives of faith together. Hope that there is a way through difficulty and pain keeps us going against all odds as individuals and as communities.

Sometimes when we are walking through valleys of despair, we feel we are not genuinely engaged with life, we are just going through the motions. And there are those times when that is all we can do. Our hearts are not in the work we are doing or in the life we are living. There used to be an expression years ago that told people to “fake it until you make it.” We were to keep on living life and appear that we were fully in touch and that we really knew what we were doing until a day dawned when we did. It was kind of like telling people to stop complaining and stewing around in the juices of their dismay and to “suck it up, Buttercup,” and move on. Believe it or not, this approach to times of despair and difficult living has worked for many people. Some have emerged from depression or at least some dissatisfaction with their lives. Some have come out of exile. Very often, it seems, the way we think is the way we are. If we think we are getting better, eventually we do.

Jesus must have known this, he often asked people if they wanted to be well and then would advise them that they should take up their beds and walk. They had it within themselves to be better all along they just did not realize it. Their faith would make them well.

Picture that leper, discovering that he had been healed returning to Jesus to offer a simple word of thanks. What had happened to him and to the other 9 lepers was an incredible healing, salvation from a desperate, lonely life, a restoration of wholeness. It was a major event. Yet, only one out of ten appreciated the work Jesus had done enough to thank him. And that one was a Samaritan, a person looked down upon by the Jews one hardly expected to offer thanks. Those of us who work closely with other humans know that one out of ten is not bad at all. We also know that there are those times when those we have helped the most tend to try to injure us in return. That seems to be just a fact of our life together as humans.

Realizing that there are people all around us who are suffering through life at this very moment should call us to acts of compassion and understanding. When we are tempted to turn away from those struggling to see the light of another day and trying to make the best of things, we need to touch base with the teachings of Christ and discover how we may best use them to reach out and help others move forward forbearing them and loving them.

Soren Kierkegaard reminded us of this when he wrote: “Adversity not only draws people together but brings forth that beautiful inward friendship, just as the cold winter forms ice-figures on the window panes which the warmth of the sun effaces.” Amen