

Memorize & Ponder

**Brentwood Presbyterian Church
September 15, 2013**

Don't Worry, Be Witnesses

**Acts 1:6-8 & Ps 14
(14, 727, 439, 634)**

As we move through the Scriptures
with our short passages to memorize and ponder,
we've reached the Book of Acts,
the Acts of the Apostles.

The idea behind this year's discipline
of memorizing and pondering key verses from throughout the Scriptures
is to get a deeper and broader sense
of the ways in which God is present in our lives
and transforms them from day to day
as the Holy Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)
nourishes us to flourish in the well-being intended by God.

That's what faith does.
It nourishes us to flourish in the grace of Jesus Christ.

To flourish is to live abundantly,
to recognize that we are filled with the gifts of the Spirit
and designed in every part of our beings
to share those gifts in everything we do.

What qualities of human flourishing are seen in this kind of life?

At the risk of sounding like a broken record,
I'll repeat Paul's list from Galatians,
that eloquent letter about the freedom that Christians enjoy –
love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity,
faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

What I find intriguing these days
as I work with people in my coaching practice,
all these years after Paul identified those qualities,
is that contemporary psychologists
are confirming through their research and reflection
that these qualities are crucial to human health and well-being.

Positive psychologist Barbara Fredrickson
describes ten forms of positivity –
joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement,
inspiration, awe, and love.

That list, when you dig into it, is very similar to Paul's list.

To flourish, then, to live as a positive presence in the world,
to be a blessing,
is to accept as gift those qualities
and live them out with every breath we take
in every situation in which we find ourselves.

The gifts are ours, thanks to the grace of Jesus Christ.
The opportunities surround us every day.
The guidance in using those gifts
comes from the Holy Spirit's work throughout our beings –
in our physical energy, our emotional energy,
our intellectual energy, and our spiritual energy.
God's grace in Jesus Christ is pervasive throughout our beings.

When you read both Paul and Barbara Fredrickson carefully,
you find that they place a great emphasis on
on how you see things,
how you think about things,
how you understand reality.
Your experience of divine grace/positivity
depends heavily on what you deem to be ultimately real.

Throughout the Scriptures, the contenders for our attention
are, in their simplest forms, fear and love.

Look at reality through fearful eyes,
and you will see as dread-filled world.

Look at reality through loving eyes,
And you will see a delight-filled world.

Fear is easily triggered in human beings.
It is always there and has its usefulness.
But if we let it define our possibilities in life,
we will live in a cramped, contained, and crippling space.
We will wither and die.

This is the kind of fear that leads to the kinds of questions
Jesus addresses with his disciples in our passage this morning.

“When will the good end come for us?
When will we be relieved of all this confusion and fear?
When are you finally going to make everything right?”

And Jesus replies with a strangely disturbing answer.

“That’s not something you can know.
You have to trust in the love of God.
The focus of your attention is in the wrong place.
You have the power of the Holy Spirit within and among you,
with all the gifts that brings,
so use them to witness to the flourishing they bring.”

This love casts out fear.
Trusting in the love of God helps you see things differently.
The anxiety of not knowing when the end will come
is replaced by the confidence of being loved by God
and equipped to be a blessing.
That’s the most powerful witness you can be to the kingdom of God.
Be all the things the Spirit has empowered you to be
in every situation in which you find yourselves.

Some years ago, Bobby McFerrin had a hit song
with ‘Don’t Worry, Be Happy.’
It went to #1 on the Canadian charts in 1988.
In the lyrics were these words:

*In every life we have some trouble
But when you worry you make it double*

A simple idea, but profound.

In this troubling world of ours,
if we focus our energy on witnessing to the blessing of the love of God,
to what the kingdom or commonwealth of God is all about,
then we witness to the opposite of worry.
We witness to the love that casts out fear,
to the power of God’s love that helps us to flourish.

*May the Spirit take these ponderings
and provoke in all of us
a witness of love and good deeds.*

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