

New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario
Sunday, September 15, 2019
Rev. Dr. David Thompson

“EMBRACE THE PLACE WHERE YOU ARE!”

The author of Hebrews said “Let your character or moral disposition be free from love of money including greed, avarice, lust, and craving for earthly possessions, Instead **be satisfied with your present circumstances**, and with what you have; “

Have you ever had to travel from place to place when on a holiday? It doesn't make much sense to fully unpack your suitcase does it? We take out just what we need and leave the rest packed. But if we are staying for awhile in one place it does make sense to unpack and get the clothes on hangers and the undergarments and socks in drawers.

When I was deciding whether to leave Canada and go to the US a Harvard businessman from Stratford took me to lunch and gave me some of the best advice I have ever received. “David,” he said, “Unpack your suitcases when you get the new job.”

So many of us are tentative when we get a new job or enter into a new relationship. There is sometimes something within us that is holding us back and we are not giving what we need to the situation. Perhaps you know someone who is not happy with where they are in life. Perhaps that person is upset because they are not in a close relationship or they are upset because someone is not treating them fairly at work. Some people pray desperately to God asking God to change their husband, wife or partner. They are looking for a change and they are keeping their suitcases packed. They are upset that things are not happening the way they think they ought to. Perhaps they are struggling financially.

Perhaps that person you are thinking about is you. You find yourself resisting what life is handing you and you are fighting on several fronts.

What is at the core of this problem?

Have you ever wondered why Judaism Christianity and Islam all spend a lot of time with the story of Joseph? It is the longest story of the Bible and takes up a whole chapter in the Quran. Why? Because there is a very important truth that the story of Joseph teaches us. As the Quran commentary says: “Joseph thanked and praised God and lived and died a righteous man. The story shows how the plan of God doth work without fail: it defeats the wiles of the wicked, turns evil to good, and ever leads those who are true to beatitudes undreamt of.”

What was the outstanding characteristic of Joseph? **He embraced the place where he was even when he was unjustly imprisoned in a jail.** Yes, even in Jail he shone! At the end of the story we see how the Providence of God was able to use Joseph as he rose above his circumstances to save the whole of the Middle East from famine. Joseph finally says to his brothers: “The evil you planned to do to me, has by God's design been turned to good, so that He might bring about the deliverance of numerous people.”

None of that would have been brought about if Joseph had not embraced the place where he was and held firm to a positive attitude of faith in his darkest times. **That in my view is why we have this amazing story so strongly related in these three major traditions.**

Do you embrace the place where you are when it comes to aging? The wrinkles are coming, the hair is changing color, perhaps the eyesight is failing and now the hearing? These are tough things to handle. This reminds me of the story of the little girl and her grandfather: Five-year-old Emma was sitting on her grandfather's lap as he read her a bedtime story. From time to time, Emma would take her eyes off the book and reach up to touch her grandfather's wrinkled cheek. She was alternately stroking her own cheek, then his again. Finally, Emma spoke up, "Grandpa, did God make you?"

"Yes, darling," he answered, "God made me a long time ago."

"Oh," she paused, "Grandpa, did God make me too?"

"Yes, indeed, sweetheart," he said, "God made you just a little while ago."

Feeling her face again, Emma observed, "God's getting better at it, isn't he?"

Some of us have difficulty accepting the person our son or daughter got married to. Sadie was stopped by an usher at the entrance to the Church.

The usher asked, "Are you a friend of the bride?"

Sadie quickly replied, "No, of course not. I am the groom's mother."

Some people who get married are very unhappy in the relationship, yet they stay there, their suitcase still packed but tentative.

Several months later after the wedding Sadie was talking to her best friend Phyllis

Phyllis asked, "So, Sadie, how's the bride?"

Sadie replied, "To tell you the truth, Phyllis, not good. She's so unhappy, she's lost 20 pounds already."

Phyllis then asked, "So why doesn't she leave him?"

Sadie replied, "Because she wants to lose another 15 pounds!"

There are some places or relationships where we are that are toxic to us and we do need to leave. But there are a number of things to consider before we do that.

For instance, what if the place where you are is a place where you are learning very necessary lessons? When everything is going 'swimmingly' rarely is character built, and we must remember that this world is a place for building our souls.

Sometimes the answer from God to our heartfelt prayers is no, or its not the right time, or in order for Me to do something about that situation you need to change your attitude to it and instead have faith in Me.

One of the most powerful verses in the Christian tradition on this subject is found in the book of Hebrews:

"Let your character or moral disposition be free from love of money including greed, avarice, lust, and craving for earthly possessions and **be satisfied with your present**

circumstances and with what you have; for God has said, I will not in any way fail you, nor give you up, nor leave you without support. I will not in any degree leave you helpless nor forsake nor let you down, nor relax My hold on you! **MOST ASSUREDLY NOT!**

Embracing the place where we are does not necessarily mean that we like it, or that is the place God finally wants us to be, but it is the place where we are **now** and if we are to change that, we need acceptance and faith and sometimes a lot of hard work to get through to the other side of it. Fighting the situation rarely works- relaxing and trusting in God, allows God to make a way where there is no way. **Embracing the place where you are means taking a positive faithful attitude no matter what is happening.**

People are drawn to us when we are faithfully dealing with a tough situation with a positive 'can do' attitude. Former US President Barack Obama once said over a shooting situation, that there is heroism in people that only waits for the opportunity to manifest itself. Time and time again after shots are fired people spring into action to save others. These people embrace the situation as they find it and then act to change it as they are able. God never asks more of us than that.

Jerry was a restaurant manager. Whenever he changed jobs the waiters often applied to the new establishment in order to work with Jerry. Why? Jerry was always positive no matter where he was or in whatever situation he found himself.

When asked how he could be positive all the time he would reply; "Each morning I wake up and say to myself 'Jerry you have two choices today. You can choose to be in a bad mood, or you can choose to be in a good mood. I choose to be in a good mood.' Each time something bad happens I can choose to be a victim, or I can choose to learn from it. Every time someone comes to me complaining, I can choose to accept their complaining, or I can point out the positive side of life.

But someone said to him "Yeah right, but it is not all that easy!"

"Yes, it is", said Jerry "Life is all about choices. When you cut away all the junk, every situation is a choice. You choose how you react to situations. You choose how people will affect your mood. You choose to be in a good or bad mood. The bottom line is it's your choice how you live your life!"

Several year later Jerry left open the back door of the restaurant, something every restaurateur knows never to do. He was held up at gunpoint by robbers and in trying to open the safe, his hand was shaking so much that his hand slipped off the combination. The robbers panicked and shot him.

Jerry was rushed to the hospital trauma center.

On the way there the paramedics kept telling him that he was going to be alright. "They were great" said Jerry. But when he got into the emergency room, he saw the expressions on the faces of the doctors and nurses, and he got really scared. He read in their eyes 'he's a dead man.'

So, what did Jerry do?

He embraced the place where he was and looked at a big burly nurse who was shouting questions at him. She asked him whether he was allergic to anything?

“Yes” Jerry replied as the doctors and nurses stopped working as they awaited his reply, “Bullets!” Over the laughter he told them “I am choosing to live. Operate on me as if I am alive, not dead.” After an 18-hour surgery Jerry lived, thanks to the skill of his doctors and due to his amazing faith and attitude.

Yes, faith is an attitude, it is an approach to life in all circumstances.

In the darkest hours faith will get us through to the other side of any situation. It is what our faith teaches in its essence.

So, lets choose to enjoy our lives just where we are! Life is a journey, and when the train comes to move us to the next stop, **then** let's repack our suitcases, and get onboard!

May God bless us all.

Amen