

**New St. James Presbyterian Church  
Sunday, March 10, 2019  
Rev. Dr. David Thompson**

**Enjoy your life!**

Texts from Proverbs:

“Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life!”

“A merry heart doeth good like a medicine!”

From St. Paul:

“ All things work together for good to those who love God...”

Joel Osteen tells the story of a young man who had spent hours inputting data into a computer. After he finished, he hit the enter button for the computer to give him an answer. He sat back expecting it to take some time. Instead the answer came back in the fraction of a second. The boy looked puzzled and the professor noticed and came back to ask what was wrong? The boy said he couldn't believe that the computer could have processed all that data so fast!

The professor went on to say that the human mind does much the same thing. Before any experience of any kind is stored in the brain it is first stamped positive or negative and that sensation is stored in the memory.

Most of us store by habit, either programming the mind positively or negatively. But we are free to change that.

All of us know folks who store nearly everything in their minds with a negative charge. We also know others who are incredibly positive and will store the same information with a positive charge.

A woman was at her hair dressers getting her hair styled for a trip to Rome. “You would be interested in Rome” she said to the hair dresser “because it is famous for hairstyling and they have very high standards.”

Her hairdresser responded:

“Rome? Why would anyone want to go there? It's crowded and dirty. You are crazy to go to Rome!”

“So How are you getting there?”

“We are taking Air Canada.”

“Air Canada?” exclaimed the hairdresser, “that is one terrible airline. Their planes are old, their flight attendants are rude, and they are always late on arrival. So where are you staying in Rome?”

“We are staying at this little exclusive place called Teste!”

“Oh, I know that place. Its really a dump, the worst hotel in the city. The rooms are small, the service is the pits, and they are over priced!”

“So, what are you going to do besides look at hairstyles?”

“We are hoping to see the Pope.”

“That’s rich” laughed the hairdresser. “You and a million other people trying to see him!”

A month later, the woman again came in for a hairstyle. The hairdresser asked her “So How was Rome, ...awful like I said?”

“It was wonderful!” explained the woman, “not only we were on one of Air Canada’s brand-new planes, but it was overbooked, and they bumped us into first class. The food and wine were wonderful, and I had an attendant who waited on me hand and foot. The hotel was great! They had just finished a \$5 million remodelling and now it is the finest hotel in the old city.”

“Well,” muttered the hairstylist, “ That is all well and good, but I know you didn’t get to see the Pope!”

“Actually, we were lucky. As we toured the Vatican wondering whether we would see Pope Francis or not, a Swiss guard tapped me on the shoulder and explained that the Pope likes to meet some of the visitors, and if I’d be so kind to step into his private rooms and wait, the Pope would personally give me an audience!

Sure enough, five minutes later the Pope walked through the door and met me and gave me a blessing.”

“Really?”

“So, last question, what did you think of the hairstyles?”

“Funny you should mention that, but when I was with the Pope he drew me aside looking very concerned and said; “ I hope that it wasn’t in Rome that you got that hairstyle?”

I don’t know if you are like me at the moment, but I have found myself doing a lot of negative stamping lately. The political situations around the world are so dark. The US, the border wall, immigrants’ issues, Syria, Afghanistan, Brexit, a scandal in Ottawa. It just goes on and on and all negative.

Why do I stamp these things negatively I wonder?

Speaking to his disciples about his death and having to leave them Jesus said: **“Because I have said these things to you sorrow has filled your hearts.”**

In other words, the disciples have stamped the news that Jesus must leave them as a negative. But then Jesus goes on to say, “ But if I don’t go away, The Comforter will not come.”

A little later he says “You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy. A woman in childbirth suffers because her time has come, but when she has given birth to the child, she forgets her suffering, in that a child has been born into the world. So, it is with you. You are sad now, but I will see you again and your hearts will be full of joy.”

**There is a great answer here.** Jesus is saying that what we are experiencing now that we think is negative, may not be finally negative at all. It's okay to be sad, but your concern might not be the end of the story.

Lately I have been asking myself can I find the good in every situation or is that Pollyanna and wishful thinking? Is it possible to store everything in my mind with a positive charge, even if it is dark? Is it true as St. Paul argues that all things work together for good who love God, even the dark things?

Let's face it St. Paul lived a very hard life. He was beaten up, flogged, jailed, released, shipwrecked and cuffed to a Roman soldier as a prisoner in Rome. No matter what happened to him he remained a man of faith. It was he who said, "All things work together for good."

In other words, if we work at it like St. Paul did, we too can train our minds to see the good even in the darkest places. One of the goods that we see now is that St. Paul wrote extremely helpful letters from his prison cell that still help millions of people to sort out the world.

You and I know people who seem to cope well in all circumstances. What do these special people know?

Like others they lose a job, lose a spouse or a friend to cancer. They plan a financial portfolio, but it collapses - yet they carry on happily! Other people see these events as roadblocks they cannot get past. They do not enjoy their lives. Everything gets stamped negative. They plod on down the furrow of life putting one foot after the other; instead of seizing the **future, they lose it to despair.**

**But I am interested in those who cope well.** What can we learn from them? Not only do they cope, **but they enjoy their lives as well.** How do they do that? What do they know?

1) They know something about change.

When we have a roadblock view of life we say, "Why cannot life go on as it did before? Before I lost my job, before I lost my spouse, before my child committed suicide? I did everything I knew to keep her alive, I spent hours, days, weeks, years working with her, but she chose to take her life anyway!

**If only this had not happened!"**

What is the difference between the roadblock person and the one who copes in any situation?

People who cope, believe deeply in change as a good thing, even when it is hard. The old hymn says, "Change and decay in all around I see".

**Change happens to be the way things are on planet earth.** Nothing stays the same, no matter how much we want it to. Nostalgic thinking about the past is a failure to deal with this most basic principle of living on planet earth. Life changes all the time and we need to accept that. Those who do cope can even find happiness in and with the changes!

If there was no change, we would not have life, we would have death and it would be endlessly boring. Some people think that Heaven will be a changeless reality. Think again. The great One who made earth also made heaven. As earth is not boring, why do we think that the same Creator would create a dull sequel to earthly life?

If, however, we resist change, I can pretty well guarantee that we will see bereavement, retirement, divorce, suicide and unemployment very negatively. In fact, we will become negative on the world and life itself.

2) The Bible is full of change narratives.

“Noah, I am going to flood the earth!”

“Abraham, I want you to pick up and leave Ur.”

“Where am I going God?”

“I will tell you when you get there!”

“Mary your life will change. You will get pregnant with Someone who will change the world!”

“What?!” she says, “I am not even married!”

**Conclusion? People who cope really well stamp change as a positive! Noah, Abraham and the Virgin Mary did. In fact, she said that with God all things are possible.**

3) A low self image has a lot to do with how we cope with change. If we have a low self image, we will likely do a lot of negative stamping. If we identify completely with our job or spouse or family and then if we lose that identity for any reason, if our self image is low, we won't cope well.

I knew one man who took his life when he was fired after being the President of his company.

But successful copers when they face an obstacle they would rather not face, decide that this is an opportunity for personal growth and they let the change, change them for the better. It's a bit like being swamped by a wave or riding it to shore.

Once when a job came to an end for me, a friend said to me “David don't sit around feeling sorry for yourself. You have a window here. Start again before the window closes.”

I did so and it changed my life positively for the better. I got on the wave and rode it. It felt good, very good!

If you have never faced yourself but have always plunged into work or a relationship in order to hide from yourself, the slamming of a door could potentially be the opportunity to love and accept yourself for the first time. Who are you when you are alone, without a distraction of some kind? Do you like yourself? Are you good company for yourself? Because if you are, **you will be good company for others as well.**

4) People who cope well **don't blame**. They are not interested in pointing fingers. Their question is always: ‘How, do we solve this problem? It is not “Whose fault is this?” But “How can I help?”

Leo Buscaglia used to say, “ You haven’t grown up if you blame someone for what happened to you yesterday, and yesterday lies at the heart of divorce, bereavement, job loss and the collapse of dreams.”

Are we like the Beatles stuck in the misery of yesterday? “ Yesterday! All my troubles seemed so far away Now it looks as though they are here to stay, O I believe in yesterday!”

5) **It is always the truth that sets us free.** If we are bound up today with ropes then we are in some way resisting the truth.

This is often our temptation. On this first Sunday in Lent we remember that Jesus was tempted as we are, yet without sin. He didn’t give in.

Here is how we can give in:

- We don’t want to deal with the reality of change
- We don’t want to believe that everything can work together for our ultimate good
- We are running from our true self, hiding in a job or relationship and we find that out when we crash
- We have not grown up. We blame. We point fingers and stamp those situations negatively instead of saying “ What can I learn from this?”

When Jesus left his disciples, he promised the Holy Spirit to them as a life companion. This gift is also ours.

This Spirit witnesses with our spirit to lead us into the truth that sets us free, always!

The Spirit of God has a mission: To lead us into truth in every circumstance of our lives. **We will know the Holy Spirit is at work when we find freedom from fear, and freedom from the negative stamping process, that leads us to misery.** It is the Holy Spirit who teaches us that roadblocks can be surmounted and that even in the darkest situations we can find a way when there is no way.

When the Berlin wall went up it was a roadblock both to those who wanted to leave or enter East Germany. On the east side there was a no man’s land, heavily guarded with machine guns. An engine driver, in East Berlin who drove a large locomotive, over a period of time, scouted the rail tracks on either side of the wall. He slowly satisfied himself, without arousing suspicions, that yes, the tracks were still there as they used to be!

One night, with his family and a few friends who wanted to escape, he fired up the largest locomotive on the Eastern side and drove it at high speed at the wall. When he went through the East side no man’s land there was a hail of bullets. Ducking down behind heavy metal sides the train driver and his friends drove the train at high speed at the wall and the wall disintegrated as they crashed through to freedom on the other side.

Another East German was a scuba diver. Looking at the identical problem of the wall he saw it differently. The river flowed under the wall. Normally anyone who tried to swim the river was shot and many died that way.

But this young man was thoughtful. He saw that in the winter, thick ice formed on the river and it formed in a certain way. Before no man's land it was open water out of range of gun shots. On the other side of the wall down river, also out of range of fire, there was open water. **This young man noting the change in the situation in wintertime sought the opportunity in it. He decided to master the realities of the change.**

He went to a swimming pool and practised swimming the distance several hundred yard under water. One very dark night when the ice was thick, he slipped into the river and swam under the ice. He was seen by the guards who opened fire. But the ice was too thick, and our friend passed underneath the ice to safety to arrive on the West Berlin side FREE!

So, I have questions for us all today.

Is it possible to cope better when we have a positive attitude? Is it possible to see the good in everything? Is it possible that we can learn to stamp everything positively? And then is it possible through the help of the Holy Spirit of God to see the truth in the situation that will set us free?

Yes, if we believe with St. Paul **that all things work together for good for those who love God. This promise also works for the whole of the planet** and also finally by the end of time for those who know no God; for God is Sovereign over all and will work all things together for good. Period.

But don't wait for the period! Begin now, for if we do, **we will enjoy our lives.**

Let's give ourselves permission to enjoy our life by putting away the negative stamp pad. Let's search out the good in every situation, no matter how dark, and mark it future positive.

Then let's swim beneath the ice of change to freedom, using the oxygen of the belief that **all things work together for good for those who love God.**

May this verse always give us an inside track to help us enjoy our lives!

Believe it and it shall happen for you; as this verse just happens to be the one that underpins the entire universe!

Believe it and be free!