

Embrace the place where you are!

Text: Hebrews 13: 5:

“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.¹I will not in any degree leave you helpless nor forsake you, nor¹let you down, nor¹relax My hold on you! MOST ASSUREDLY NOT!”

St Paul said: I have learned that in whatever state I am in therewith to be content. Philippian 4:11-13

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 business man 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 a 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, partner or job situation. 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 that person you are thinking about is you. You find yourself resisting what life is handing you and you are fighting on several fronts. And you have not committed to the situation to work it out, but are holding back.

What is at the core of this problem?

Have you ever wondered why The Bible takes up so much space on the story of Joseph? It is the longest story of the Bible. Why is it included? **Because there is one very important truth that the story of Joseph teaches us among the many.**

What was the outstanding characteristic of Joseph?

He embraced the place wherever he found himself. Yes, even in jail, he embraced the place and 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 throughout, a positive attitude of faith in his darkest times.* That in my view is why we have kept this amazing story, in the center of the Biblical traditions.

In the modern day, Nelson Mandela embraced the place where he was. He too was in jail. He too saved his country in a desperate situation. He said once that it was his faith that got him through the darkest of times.

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 true 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 married.

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

There are some places or relationships where we are that are toxic to us and we do need to leave if we are able. 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. The Bible teaches us that if we have faith, it might not take the situation away, but faith will get us through it. With faith we are able to bear it. Sometimes the answer from God to our heartfelt prayers is no, or its not the right time, or in order for God to be able to do something we need to grow our faith. Or there are things we don't know about, or that we can't know about, that nevertheless are part of a much wider plan.

One of the most powerful verses on this subject is found in the book of Hebrews the 13th chapter and 5th verse.

“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.¹I will not in any degree leave you helpless nor forsake you, nor ¹let 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 things for the better, 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. As the Knox motto says: “With God we find a 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. President Obama once remarked, that there is heroism in people that only waits for the opportunity to manifest itself. When tragedy unexpectedly strikes frequently 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 continue 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 either to be in a good or bad mood. The bottom line is: its 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. Its an approach to life we can all have no matter what happens.

I love the verse: “Is there anything too hard for God?” Have you proved that truth?

In the darkest hours, faith will get us through to the other side of any situation. It is what will get you through that tough meeting, that divorce you are contemplating, that crisis of faith that is sapping all your joy, that loss of a life partner, that cancer diagnosis, that Alzheimer’s onset.

We can choose to enjoy our life exactly, where we are! We can believe that God loves us and cares. As Hebrews says: “I will not in any degree leave you helpless nor forsake you, nor let you down, nor relax My hold on you! **MOST ASSUREDLY NOT!**”

Our entire Life is a journey and when we see the train in the distance that is coming to move us to the next stop, **then** let’s pack our suitcases and get onboard! And when we arrive, lets unpack our suitcases, roll up our sleeves and claim Jesus’ promise for tough situations: The last words he said to us were: “Lo I am with you even unto the end of the world.”

Whatever situation you are facing,

Put your hand in the hand of the man

Who stilled the water

Put your hand in the hand of the man

Who calmed the sea

Take a look at yourself

And you can look at others differently

Put your hand in the hand of the man

From Galilee. Amen

