

## Learning to Love Life!

“Why is Life given to those who find it so bitter?

They wait for death but it does not come

They seek death more eagerly than hidden treasure!” (Book of Job)

“I am come that human beings may have Life and might have it in all its fullness!” (Jesus of Nazareth)

In my high school when I was a student, there was a boy who hated life. He came to school every day and took the lunch that his dear mother had carefully made for him and threw it into the garbage can. He then bought an ice cream cone and that was all he ate each day. He regularly made himself sick after his evening meal. Gradually his eyes became clouded and his teeth began to rot.

I decided to challenge him one day about how great life was and he replied “I hate life. I didn’t ask to be born! I did not choose to come. I do not choose to go on living.” The last time I saw him he was a walking skeleton...

Early in Ministry I was visiting in a hospital. I was to see a 90 something woman who had broken her hip. She said to me, “I can’t wait for each day to begin. I look forward to my breakfast and who will be my nurse for the day. Everybody is so good to me and the hospital is such a great place to be! So many people are being helped here all the time. I think that the doctors are wonderful. They have such a hard job and they stay so cheerful. It’s a great place to be when you are sick!”

Have you ever asked yourself why there are such different reactions to Life? Why is it that some love life and others hate it?

Scott Peck in his bestselling book The Road Less Travelled tells the story of Ted who hated life. Ted withdrew into a cabin in the woods. He did little there except keep himself alive.

Ted's story was that it all started when a love affair went bad. Then a good friend died and he took off for the woods to a lonely cabin.

But during psychotherapy Peck discovered that the neurosis that had grown inside of Ted went well back into his childhood.

This is how his parents had chosen to discipline him: Everything that Ted was enthusiastic about they took away as a method of getting him to toe the line! So the special trip to see his aunt they cancelled. Then there were his bows and arrows. So they took them away. And on and on it went...

**“Simple system” said Ted: “Everything I was enthusiastic about they took away. Everything I loved I lost.”**

So, in adulthood Ted, sub consciously, carried the system on. He got enthusiastic about a girl. They broke up. He learned again. He developed an enthusiasm for a friend. The friend died. So Ted learned that it did not pay to be enthusiastic about life. So, now the subconscious became his present reality and so he withdrew to the cabin in the woods...

I was reading a book written by a pair of psychologists from Western. They were talking about parenting. One mother was heard remarking to her child “I don't know when you have ever behaved worse than today. You were just terrible!”

A wiser mother praised her little child at every available opportunity. Here is a sample of what she said to her child to affirm her: “I told your grandma, that I was going to be proud of you today. You were just great!

I'm so proud of you!" and she hugged her! The little child's face was lit up with a great big smile.

I would be willing to bet that the first child might very well lose enthusiasm for life and become a 'Ted' and withdraw. The second child who was regularly affirmed at every opportunity would have a great advantage in Life!

You say to me, "I'm a parent. Is it then all up to the parents? Do we program our children for life?"

Absolutely not! We are free beings. Even if we have suffered damage as children, it is still possible to love life.

**Here is what I have learned about Life in a nutshell: Whatever we tell ourselves about life, we come to believe is true.**

A woman came into a minister's study for counseling. She said "I hate my husband. I am going to commit suicide. I can't cope any longer. The kids are too much. I never have any money. I just hate life."

"Hold it right there," said the minister. "I want you to reverse all those statements. Say after me, I love my husband. I am going to celebrate life. I am coping beautifully. I handle the kids easily. I've got more money than I need. I love Life!"

The woman said immediately "But that is lying. I can't do that!"

The minister said,

"Oh no, its not. The other is lying. For one month I want you to reverse those statements you have just made and come to see me again. For the next ¾ of an hour the minister asked the woman to reverse all of her negative statements. Then she left his office thinking that he was a total fool! But she was just desperate enough to do what he said..."

One month later she returned, her eyes sparkling. There was a spring in her step.

“You know”, she said. “It works! I can’t believe it, but it works. At first, I didn’t believe it at all, but I kept trying. After a week I noticed that I was enthusiastic about a few little things in my day. Now I love my husband and he loves me. I’ve stopped saying negative things about him all over town. And my kids are just great. And money? I’ve got a new job with a big raise. I can’t understand it really, but it works!”

Socrates said “As a man thinks so is he.”

If you think your marriage is on the rocks, that your kids are awful, that you are financially stressed and that your life is not worth living then these negative states of mind will bear a crop of blackened fruit.

But here is the good news! Reverse these same statements and the flood gates of a mighty dam will be opened. You will find that you have power.

The Greek word for enthusiasm literally means in God or ‘en theos’. It means literally getting so filled up inside with God that you are excited about life. Have you experienced that feeling? You can, and there is no feeling comparable!

All pain and suffering, all cancers, all disease and death are part of the wrapping papers of the world we live in. And with these things this earth is fulfilling its function as a place where souls are made.

God could have created a world without pain or suffering and without challenge, but that was not God’s purpose. **Let’s remember Power is the ability to fulfill purpose.** What was the purpose? God wanted a place where Love could grow in all its dimensions. So, God created a world of incredible beauty, a world of dark and light where human

beings could live, love and learn with the greatest teacher of all: LIFE ITSELF!

So many people lose their faith in God over a tragedy of some kind. A sick friend is prayed for and she dies. Somewhere in their lives these folk pray for something they think God should have acted on and God apparently did not act.

The text we began this sermon with is from the Book of Job. Job slowly lost everything and as this losing process was going on Job got increasingly bitter. God wasn't playing the ball game by the rules as far as he was concerned. He got sick, lost his estates, his wife and children and his friends told him to curse God and die.

So Job said "Why is life given to those who find it so bitter?"

Job wanted an Arbitrator who would put his hand on the shoulder of God and the shoulder of Job and bring them together. Without a great Someone to bring them together Job was in despair...

Let's go back to log-cabin-Ted for a moment. At one point Scott Peck discovered in the therapy that Ted had had a miraculous escape from death. He had been standing on the edge of a pier in a strong wind and a huge rogue wave had washed him off the pier. He thought he was a goner. Then a second wave as large as the first threw him back onto the pier again, unharmed.

Scott Peck asked him, "How did you feel about it?"

"You mean about being saved? He queried

"Yes."

"Well, I guess I felt fortunate."

“Fortunate?” Peck asked. “So, it was just an unusual coincidence, that backwash wave?”

“Yes, that’s all.”

Peck said, “Some might call it miraculous!”

“I guess I was lucky.”

“You guess, you were lucky?” Peck repeated, goading him.

“Yes Goddammit, I guess I was lucky!”

Peck said to Ted, “It is interesting Ted, that whenever something significantly painful happens to you, and you get out of it somehow, you guess that you are lucky. But a minor tragedy and its all God’s fault. A miraculous blessing and you are just a bit lucky...”

I think Peck is on the money here. People who hate life are like Ted. A tragedy of any kind and it’s God’s fault. He doesn’t exist we say. Look at my failed marriage. I tried so hard. My lover died! My grandfather died, my brother and sister died. How could a God of love permit that to happen to them and to me?

But when the miraculous blessings come, we are just a bit lucky...

**This morning I am here to challenge us all to believe in God again, or perhaps for the first time:** to believe that underneath all tragedy there is a huge guarantee: “That all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his Purpose.”

And what is God’s purpose?

Love!

In order to experience what I am talking about today we will have to give God **the benefit of our doubts**. We need to look at the whole

picture of this beautiful, wonderland world of magic, to see that a Great Hand of Love holds us all in care; and undergirds this fragile beauty we know as planet earth.

You and I, will have to put our hands into the Great Hand that stilled the waters of a remote lake in a remote part of the Roman Empire 2,000 years ago; it's to put our hand into the Hand of One who spread the stars when time began...and trust that Christ's promise is personal to each one of us: "I am come that you might have LIFE and might have it in all its fullness."

Christianity is not about following a bunch of rules. Its not about feeling guilty all the time. IT not about feeling anxious all the time.

What is it about? Eileen Caddy has a beautiful quote that addresses this text about abundant life and what that means. She says:

Expect your every need to be met. Expect the answer to every problem, expect abundance on every level.

Perhaps then the most important question of our lives is this one: "Will we believe this promise for abundant life is for *us personally*, or will it be just a bunch of meaningless words?"

If we believe the promise, all our fear- based thinking will evaporate, all the violence and hostility, All the worrying about our futures will all be replaced with peace of mind.

That Peace stilled the sea of Galilee 2000 years ago. It can be inside our minds and hearts today! And if that happens, it will determine whether we hate life, or Love it and look forward to the next adventure!

Amen.