

“Rekindling the gift”

October 3, 2010

Text: *Ephesians 3:14-19, 2 Timothy 1:1-14*

I.

Life is difficult!

With these three words psychiatrist, M. Scott Peck, began his best selling book of the late seventies, *The Road Less Traveled*. The principle thesis of *The Road Less Traveled* is that, too often, people opt for *the road most traveled* or—in other words—the easy way out. Peck’s book is a commentary against the tendency in life to put off solving our problems, to avoid pain and struggle when—perhaps—pain and struggle are what we need to grow as a person or as a nation.

- **Life is difficult**, it turns out, is akin to the first of the *Four Noble Truths* which Buddha taught, that *Life is suffering*.
- *Life is suffering*, according to Buddhist teaching, because human nature is not perfect and neither is the world we live in.

Peck calls the awareness that *Life is difficult* a great truth—indeed, one of the greatest truths. In a sense, it’s a sort of wake up call because, he says, once we see this truth, we are able to transcend it. Once we truly grasp this truth and accept it, then life is no longer difficult. The key is awareness and acceptance.

Hey, it’s the way things are. It’s called *life*. And once we accept it—that life is difficult, full of daily challenges and tough decisions—it no longer matters because by then, we’ve moved on.

II.

In our reading this morning from 2 Timothy—a letter attributed to the Apostle Paul, but a letter that is almost certainly a product of the Pauline school, followers of Paul who wrote a generation later—the author is giving Timothy, a young disciple of Paul and one of his helpers, a *faith pep talk*.

Timothy has been going through some tough times, to the point where he seems to have been questioning his faith. Speaking to Timothy, Paul—or someone writing for him—says,

1. *I am grateful to God, remembering you constantly in my prayers.*
2. And then he adds: *Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy.*

2 Timothy understands that Timothy has been going through a tough period and so, he's trying to encourage him. Going on, he says,

*I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. For this reason I remind you to **rekindle the gift** of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands ...*

In other words, life is tough; we all know that. So, buck up, remember who you are—particularly as a person of faith—and *get it together!*

2 Timothy expresses all of this in tones of gratitude, rooted powerfully in what God has done for us in Christ. In the BIG PICTURE of our lives, 2 Timothy is saying, we have much to be grateful for. And in our faith journey, *gratitude* is always a good starting point. It adds perspective to things.

So, *be thankful*, the scripture says. It'll make your day better.

III.

For both M. Scott Peck's *The Road Less Traveled* and the young Timothy in our reading, *life is difficult*.

However, for Peck, the fact of *life being difficult* is an opportunity. It's an opportunity for personal growth. The problem, Peck suggests, is that people don't tend to see life this way—that life's difficulties and problems are occasions for growth. Instead, they moan and complain about the enormity of their problems, their many burdens—all the while, as if life *should* be easy.

Perhaps, friends, *The Road Less Traveled* is really a book for the early 21st century. In recent weeks and months, I can't believe the national silliness and immaturity disguised as anger that we've been seeing. Anger ought to be about something a lot deeper than ...

- more people—particularly, the poor—having health care ... or ...
- restoring a just tax system for the richest Americans and ... or ...
- a call for responsible regulation of Wall Street.

Think about it! No matter what the status of the current recession, isn't it the truth of our lives that we have a lot to be grateful for as Americans? In the BIG PICTURE of things, aren't we a nation of enormous blessings and good fortune over the scores and decades?

IV.

Listen to these words on the back cover of *The Road Less Traveled*. It says:

Confronting and solving problems is a painful process, which most of us attempt to avoid. And the very avoidance results in greater pain and an inability to grow both mentally and spiritually.

In *The Road Less Traveled*, M. Scott Peck suggests ways in which confronting and resolving our problems—and suffering through the changes—can enable us to reach a higher level of self-understanding.

Is it possible that Peck is on to something here that, over time, will be good for America? Namely, that suffering through the changes ... and working our way through the pain helps us, along the way, to become a more mature, responsible people?

Sometimes, suffering and pain are the only way to get to the other side. Again, *life is difficult!*

V.

And in this same vein, to the anguished Timothy, 2 Timothy says:

1. *remember who you are.*
2. *Remember the faith commitments of your family (your grandma, Lois, and your mother, Eunice). And that's not all.*
3. *Remember—too—the gifts that were alive in your spirit through the laying on of my hands.*

According to this scripture reading, Timothy was ordained by Paul. The whole point of ordination is to consecrate the gifts in a believer so those gifts can be used for spreading the gospel and for edifying and building up the faith community.

Evidently, Timothy has spiritual gifts worthy of ordination. Therefore, says Paul, ***rekindle the gift of God that is within you.***

And furthermore, ***For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.***

In other words, Timothy, *don't be a wimp!* Grow up, be grateful, behold the power the spirit has given you and, through love and self-discipline, get it done! ***Rekindle the gift!***

The *gift* is the gift of faith and the personal awareness to be grateful and to have love and self-discipline in the process.

VI.

So, when we understand, indeed, that *Life is difficult*, we come to an acceptance that

life is a series of problems to be worked at and resolved. As mature adults, we have to confront the difficulty head on. Again, the starting point is *gratitude* and the process is *love* and *self-discipline*.

When we are truly grateful, we see the BIG PICTURE of our lives. We have perspective; and we understand that our struggles and our suffering aren't necessarily to be avoided. They're part of a process—a process of discernment that leads to personal growth.

Mature self-awareness knows that some amount of suffering and working through legitimate pain work together to help us grow.

As a nation, we're going through a period of painful growing pains. For example, beyond our economic woes, every day we're more diverse. That's simply our reality. And great diversity always spells change.

1. For some, regrettably, change and transition pose an enduring stumbling block to contentment and a sense of optimism about the future.
2. However, for others, they're an opportunity to enlarge the circle of our lives and become bigger and better human beings.

And so, friends, as we seek to *rekindle the gift* of God that is within us; and as we seek greater awareness of the world around us and of the power of love at work within us, may the prayer of Ephesians 3 be alive on our lips ...

... that we have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth ...and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that we may be filled with the fullness of God!

And friends, that *fullness* is about love, forgiveness, compassion, kindness and generosity of spirit.

These are the gifts of the Spirit, the gifts of our faith. Let us *rekindle the gift!*

All praise be unto God! Amen!

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