

**“Wrestling With: Turmoil Within”
Sermon by Karen Hilfman Millson
St. Paul’s United Church, Orillia
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Gospel Reading: Matthew 4: 1-11

Let us pray:
When we wrestle with turmoil within
from temptation
from grief
from chaos,
come and be our living bread, O Spirit of Christ.
By grace protect and preserve us.
Guide us toward the path you walk,
so that the voice that leads us is the voice of God,
the voice of love.
Amen

A young child of three years had been practising
the prayer of Jesus every night with his mom.
The night came that he was ready to say the prayer on his own.
He carefully enunciated each word.
Every one was right, right up to the end of the prayer:
‘Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us *some e-mail*. Amen.’

As ones who are called to listen to God’s Living Word to lead us,
it sure would be handy if it just came via e-mail electronically delivered on a
moment-by-moment need–by-need basis.

There is a true story of a minister who was ready to leave work
one night and so he phoned his wife
as he did each evening before strolling home.
The phone rang and rang.
Odd, he thought. Then he phoned back.
His wife picked up on the first ring.
He asked her why she didn’t pick up the first time he called.
‘The phone didn’t ring. I was sitting right beside it.’
HMMMM.

The next day, the minister got a call.
A man with hesitation in his voice said 'Did you call me last night?'
The minister was puzzled.
The man said, 'It was at 5:37.'
Ah, the missing call. And so the minister explained what had happened.
The man told him this story:
'I had come to the conclusion that my life was not worth living and
had assembled what I needed to end my miserable life.
In anguish, I prayed one last time: if there is anyone who cares for me, or
any reason not to do this, God, give me a sign.
Right at that moment the phone rang.
I checked call display. It said, *God Almighty*.
I was so stunned I didn't answer but
stared at it as it rang into the night.'
The minister explained that he was minister at *God Almighty Lutheran
Church*. The call display had shortened the name...
and reached into the night-time of this man's fear.

We might not get messages that are as clear as e-mails on a moment-by-
moment basis that that three-year-old unwittingly prayed for,
or that come on call display,
but God's Living Word speaks to us, all around us,
calling us to life, calling us to a path that is illuminated by light.
But that Living Word can be hard to hear... hard to sense...
when life is overwhelming, in those moments and times in our lives when
we are wrestling with turmoil within
and fear or grief is consuming us.

This past week, I experienced being overwhelmed with such strong feelings
that I couldn't see or hear anything beyond the turmoil within. It was hard to
hear any assurance
because my own mind was clamouring with anxiousness.
Most of us can probably think of such moments in our life
when fear or grief or the need to make a decision that is difficult fills us,
consumes, us, throwing us into chaos,
into a cloud of unknowing.

So how do we wrestle with that kind of turmoil within?
In the Older Testament there is the story of Jacob
wrestling with a man all through the night

as he wrestled with what he must do the next day:
go to his brother Esau to ask for forgiveness for stealing his birthright.
In that night of wrestling Jacob is changed,
so radically changed that he is given a new name.
The name is Israel because the man said he had wrestled
with God and man, and had won.
And though he walked toward his brother with a disjointed hip
that was a mark of the wrestling he experienced,
he did walk to his brother and he did do what he needed to do.
And his brother received him, forgave him,
and welcomed him home.

This week I was filled with overwhelming grief
in connection with Greg Allen's death.
I needed to wait for Kate to come back to Orillia after a presentation,
to tell her about Greg's death and that we needed to go and tell
their children, Rebecca and Luke, that their father had died.
This was a task that Kate had to do three years ago with her siblings when
both her parents had died in a car crash in Spain.

Grief at how this would touch the lives of so many felt
like it was choking me with tears as I waited...
I finally sat down and e-mailed a friend far removed from this community,
who I could tell what I was experiencing
without needing to give names.
In the writing, the journaling, the telling of the story,
I figured out that what I needed to do was sit and send prayer energy to
strengthen Kate and Rebecca and Luke and Wendy, Greg's partner,
who was still in the Dominican alone,
and fill them with a booster shot dose of light and love and wisdom
for what they knew not was to come.

Wrestling with turmoil within
so that it does not have the power to consume us.

I remember someone coming to me after worship one Sunday to say that her
greatest fear of beginning radiation treatment the next day was that with all
the anxiousness flowing through her she wouldn't be able to sit still, which
she had to do for the treatment.
She asked me for some wisdom.

Different ideas flitted through my mind—anxious to help—
it lighted upon a suggestion that made all the difference for her:

“As you settle in for the treatment, repeat these words,
to allow God’s voice to fill your mind and heart:

‘Be still and know that I am God.

Then repeat the line slowly, dropping a line each time you say the line—Be
still and know that I am...

Be still and know... all the way down to

Be still... then simply Be’.”

That gave her a path to walk in the turmoil.

Not quite an e-mail, but still a message of assurance
that has echoed across the centuries

from the poet who wrote it so long ago...

an assurance, a truth, a wisdom that carries power for us even today.

One of the greatest sources of turmoil in our lives is grief.

Grief enters our lives for so many reasons

and in so many times in our lives.

Grief comes in death, and in all the losses and changes in our lives.

How do we begin to wrestle with that turmoil?

In his book, *A Grief Observed*, C.S. Lewis noted:

“No one told me that grief would feel so much like fear.”

Not long ago, I was with a family in the early hours of the new day
as they were faced with a second tragic death in their family
in a span of just 20 days.

We had a conversation that I was given permission to share.

The daughter of the woman who lay dying was pondering,

‘How do we deal with so much grief, so much loss, with this death
and the death 20 days before of our sister?’

I felt a well of tears rise up in me with no clear words to share in that
moment, though I know that grief is a journey,

and I knew and trusted that they would be given strength and gifts
and blessings that would help them

as they walked through this incredible loss.

I could find no words that would meet the darkness and turmoil
of this second loss they were facing.

Forty-five minutes later, I was given an answer.

I shared it with the daughter.

How do you deal with this kind of grief?
One way is to look at your mother's life, she who lived with the grief of two
of her children dying as infants,
her children who, she had told me at the time of her daughter's recent death,
she still missed and thought of every day.

Still life goes on.

You do not forget the one you love.

You feel the loss and the gratitude for all that has been shared.

And you walk through every day more acutely aware of
how fragile life is.

So you live each day well, trying to focus on what really matters.

The journey through grief
is the journey through turmoil
is the journey through life.

One of the greatest gifts we can give to ourselves is the awareness that we do
not have to constantly carry the burdens,
and we don't have to carry them alone.

Jesus' words give us comfort: "Come unto me all you who are weary and
heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

A lecture on stress management provides
a great image for us for the journey.

The lecturer raised a glass of water and asked the gathering,
"How heavy is this glass of water?"

Twenty grams, one hundred grams, 500 grams?"

Students gave various answers. Then the lecturer said,

"The actual weight doesn't really matter.

What matters is how long you try to hold it.

If I hold the glass for a minute, that's not a problem.

If I hold it an hour, I'll have an ache in my arm.

If I hold it for a day, you'll have to call an ambulance.

Same weight, but the longer I hold it, the heavier it becomes."

And that's the way it is with stress management—
or turmoil management.

If we carry our burdens all the time, the burden becomes increasingly
heavier and, sooner or later, we won't be able to carry on.

And that's the way it is with stress management,

or turmoil management.

If we carry our burdens all the time,
The burden becomes increasingly heavier, and sooner or later
we won't be able to carry on.

As with the glass of water, we have to put it down for a while and rest before
holding it again.

When we're refreshed, we can carry on with the burden.

Children know how to do that well.

I watch them in a time of grief.

They can be sobbing and wailing one moment and
laughing and playing seconds later.

When we gather on Wednesday evenings for Wisdom Circle,
one of the things that I invite people to do is bring all their energy
to the present moment and if they feel like their energy needs to stay with a
place of concern in their life,
to surround that place with the energy of light and love,
and let it rest gently in the palm of God's hand
so that for just these few moments they can be fully
in the present moment –which is where we experience
healing and refreshment.

Rather than being worn out by the burden of grief or turmoil,
we need to create pauses in our life.

We can intentionally place our concern in the palm of God's hands or
another way is to focus on what we are grateful for,
which shifts our energy, creating new space within us.

Wrestling With Turmoil Within:

- by being open to how God will communicate with us,
whether by e-mail or phone call, a friend or a song on the radio
 - by reflecting on our story, telling it or journaling it,
so we can see the path we need to walk
- by trusting in the power of prayer to hold the space for our grief and
turmoil, to fill us with the power of hope and love and light
 - by creating space within through setting our burden down
for a time and by naming what we are grateful for.

We need to use these ways of wrestling with turmoil within,
so that it does not consume us.

One of the ten C's that Matthew Fox talks about that we need to teach our children and youth about, along with the three R's of school,
is chaos.

We need to teach our kids that chaos is part of the reality of life.
We need to teach them tools to help cope with chaos—
and even how to journey through chaos with the awareness that times of
chaos are part of the evolution of life and,
though they feel extremely uncomfortable, these are often
the greatest moments of growth and of birthing something new.

Chaos is part of nature.
As a midwife once noted, "Nothing is more chaotic than childbirth.
It's a mess. But observe what comes from it."
The dark night of the soul is with us everywhere today.
But science assures us—and the mystics assure us—
that darkness, unravelling, not being in control, confusion, doubt,
uncertainty (in other words, chaos)
are natural rhythms in nature.
They offer us rich occasions for learning life's deepest lessons,
lessons of trust and wonder and waiting and gestation.

Matthew Fox notes that we human beings bring some chaos upon ourselves.
We create unnecessary chaos.
Therefore, education in creativity must also include
education about our capacity for evil.
Evil is what humans create
when they prefer destruction over construction.
Evil is what humans create when we focus on the individual "I"
over the common good of others.
We are all capable of evil.

And so we return to the turmoil within that Jesus faced in the story of
temptations, for we are all faced with the same kind of temptations Jesus
faced and needed to make decisions about.

This story of Jesus' temptations is about wrestling with
temptation and evil and taking responsibility for one's actions.
Jesus, I think, wrestled with those temptations every day of his life.
And so do we in ours.

The more clearly we can take that story of Jesus and see it,

not as something that was there then,
but something that is here, now, and a universal struggle in our lives, the
more the story can speak to us.

For it's a story not so much about what we will do as *who we will be*.

Most of us in main-line churches are in positions of economic, social and
religious power. It may not seem like that most of the time.

Compared to others, we may not feel wealthy or powerful.
But compared to ones who sleep in doorways in our city centres throughout
Canada, compared to the vast majority of people throughout the world,
compared to sisters and brothers in Africa,
we are wealthy and powerful.

In a list of things to give up for Lent, it was suggested that we give up
buying anything but essentials for ourselves!

Instead, we can give the money to God
for the work of building God's Kingdom here on earth—
a kingdom that seeks the well-being of all.

The money we would spend on the luxuries
could help someone meet basic needs.

We are called to be stewards of God's riches,
not consumers.

Let us not be shy and hesitant but clear
that God calls us to make a difference in this world
that is brimming over with chaos and turmoil,
longing for there to be new life birthed in our midst.

And it will be.

It can be, and we can help when we shift from fear controlling us to
creativity and passion for good empowering us—just like Jesus did.

Let it be so. Amen.