

LIVING A BALANCED LIFE
Sermon by Karen Hilfman Millson
St. Paul's United Church, Orillia
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The Beatitudes –
The Sermon on the Mount –
a story told that is filled with the promise of blessings –
even in those times in life when life is tough.

Blessed are you
Rejoice and be glad
Blessed are you – holy are you!
Rejoice and be glad
Yours in the kingdom of God

This past week in the Adult Enquiry Group
we touched on this concept of the Kingdom of God.

It was a new idea to some in the group
that the Kingdom of God –
comes here on earth
and that the goal in life that Jesus taught
is all about how we live here
and now so that the Kingdom of God
can be experienced here and now –
so that the power of God –
the power of the divine eternal line –
can break into our midst here and now.

The gospel stories say
that Jesus told us not to be concerned about life
beyond this life
but rather to focus on living our lives now –
connected to God
(rather than worrying about doing things
to make sure we get to heaven
somewhere out there beyond time).

When we talk about
following the path that Jesus walked –
one of the big elements
that weaves in and out of that pathway –
is time alone to connect to God –
in whatever way you understand or experience God.

I once heard an interpretation of the Beatitudes –
of the Sermon on the Mount
that Betty read at the beginning of today,
that suggested that the nine points in the Beatitudes
where it declares “Blessed are”
... are nine steps in the spiritual journey as our faith matures.

The preacher suggested
that the steps build on each other –
once you have developed on that level
then you can go to the next level –
and each step is enhanced by time
alone to connect with God.

So we begin with being poor in spirit –
empty –
not so full of ourselves,
so full of our ego self,
that there is no room for God
or for our higher self.
- then we move through a time of mourning,
grieving the ways that have separated us from God –
from wholeness and well-being for all.
- then we are blessed by meekness –
a willingness to recognize that we don’t have all the answers –
that an openness to higher power
and our combined wisdom including the wisdom of the earth –
will serve us well.
- the next step is to hunger and thirst for righteousness –
to feel a passion from justice for fairness,
for right relationship being part of our decision-making.
- but mixed into our stance for justice we then need mercy –
for with mercy we can forgive ourselves
and each other
so we can move forward
without lugging around baggage from anger

The combination of our creating space for God within as
(poor in spirit)
mourning the ways things are >
that separate us from God,
recognizing that we don’t have the full answer ourselves
(meekness),
awakening our passion for righteousness and discovering the gift –
the blessing of mercy –
we then experience and move toward a “purity of heart” –
and from that purity of heart >

where we listen to our hearts as well as our minds –
we become makers of peace.
As peacemakers we often disturb the status quo
and so we are told
that we are blessed when we are persecuted for righteousness sake.
And when we are fully rejected –
when we are persecuted
and have all kinds of evil uttered against us
because we stand from our commitment to follow the way of Jesus –
to remain connected to God –
to our higher power,
to a vision of a world of compassion and respect,
where the gifts of each person
are celebrated and honoured as part of creating a world of peace –
then too we are blessed.

The Beatitudes –
journey of maturing faith that is constantly evolving .

The season of Lent
provides us with time for us to ponder our spiritual journey.

It invites us to ponder
how we are going to continue to grow and evolve
not only in knowledge or study –
though that may be part of it –
but in how our faith –
is going to impact the everyday moments of our lives.

How do we live our faith.

As we've noted before –
key element in the life of Jesus –
was his prayer life –
it kept his life balanced –
helped him to be clear
and to keep his eye on the central message –
and not get distracted by questions
that were devoid of what really matters.

At the end of February
the Sunday morning Women's Group
gathered for the annual retreat day
out at Swanmore Hall.

The theme was presented by one of our small group leaders
here at St. Paul's – Denise Toner.

The title was
“Balancing Your own Medicine Wheel”
The four areas in the medicine wheel

that Denise used for this teaching were about finding balance
in the areas of : feelings, physical, thoughts and spiritual.

She presented two wheels –
one that reflects balance in life
and one that she call the Rascal Wheel –
the things that disrupt balance in our lives.

In the area of the medicine wheel under “feelings”

it was noted that in the rascal wheel
feelings that need to be balanced
include all of our resentments –
which show up as gossip,
blame (always finding someone else to blame),
critic, judgment.

Our resentments are balanced –
or brought back into healthy alignment
through forgiveness and through gratitude –
forgiveness –
where we acknowledge
what we need and learn from an experience
and then either forgive ourselves or another –
which is not to say
that what happened is okay –
but rather to say

we are no longer going to let this situation drain us of our energy
or hold us in bondage to grudges
toward another or to beating ourselves up.
Forgiveness moves us beyond resentments
into a more balanced life –
as does gratitude –
its amazing the difference gratitude can make in our lives –
it can shift our energy upwards in an instant
and give us new eyes to see situations and people.

In the realm of the physical the rascal wheel –
the unbalanced state – is anger ...
and the choice to bring us back into balance
is the energy of love.

Under “thoughts” -
the rascal our unbalanced perspective
that can keep us in bondage
are things like –
past fears, limiting beliefs, the ego –
while a more balanced perspective
comes from ‘making up our own minds’ –

what in my life means I need to connect to my higher power –
to God –
to wisdom –
to help me see
when ego or past fears or limiting beliefs
have me in a strangle hold –
so that I have a power
that comes from beyond me
to help me to make up my own mind –
to see with eyes of love rather than fear.

In the spiritual aspect of the rascal wheel >
we are in a state where we stop caring –
if we live with our being filled up
with resentment, anger, past fears, limiting beliefs and our ego –
we come to a point where we stop caring.
But when we seek to live a balanced life
that includes forgiveness, gratitude, love
and where we make up our own minds
rather than being hooked by past fears –
that way of life is nourished by the spiritual part of life
which, in a balanced wheel,
includes prayer, meditation and ceremony.

Prayer is one of the tools,
one of the pathways that helps us to live a more balance life
and to continuously take steps
toward our faith maturing
and becoming more and more integrated
into the moments of our days.

Questions about prayer
have been coming up at Learning Circle
and Adult Enquiry Group.
Many of them arise
from our expanding understanding of God.

Questions like:
If God is within us – who do we pray to?
“Someone said –
I used to look up at the stars
and direct my prayers up there –
but now I’m not sure what to do.”

Next week
we’ll explore the topic of prayer again –
but let me share a few thoughts

that I have shared in groups these past few weeks.

I don't believe in a God who is like a puppeteer –
who steps in and adjusts things
so that some people get better,
some people get cancer and don't get better.

But I do believe
that prayer makes a difference.
Brian McGugan told me more than once –
as have others –
that he could feel the energy of prayer around him.
Scientists have observed
and recorded
the impact of prayer –
and they are clear it makes a difference.

When I say I will hold you in prayer
or I will include you in my prayers
what I imagine that looks like –
is that I am sending you
and surrounding you
with the energy of light and love
and compassion and healing and peace

It's like,
my sending that and surrounding you in it –
I am part of activating
or helping you be awake to –
that energy of love –
that power of God –
that is already upholding you.

Over recent years
we have talked a lot about God within us –
which is not to deny God beyond us,
around us, below us and above us.

I recently realized that some people
have thought that God within –
means we are praying to our self.

For me,
I experience the presence of God,
the presence of that divine, eternal energy of love >
in all of creation >
in the people I meet >
and in me.
When I go deep within –

to the core of my being
to connect to God.
I experience a place of light –
that is like a port –
an opening –
to energy beyond me
even while it's a part of me –
since all creation is one.

When I am about to go into a difficult situation
I go to that place within me
and ask for strength or wisdom or courage –
and its like it rises up within me
like a flow of energy
that shifts me to a more balanced state.

Where do we go to connect to God –
to that power of divine love –
what is the image that will help us to feel connected?
It is different for each one of us –
each of us is invited to seek >
to find a way that helps us
connect to that power of love which is God –
in a way that helps us to live balanced,
healthy, spiritual lives,
a blessing in which we ask
for things the power of the Spirit of Life .

May it be so. Amen