

Life is Good!

Philippians 4:8, 4:13

When I was in Montana I had the habit of listening to books on tape. Long distances—I came to love books on tape. A book on tape that I listened to a couple times was Norman Vincent Peale's book, The Power of Positive Thinking. Peale often talks about how people focus on obstacles. They spend too much time thinking about obstacles and giving them more substance/ credence than is their due.

He spoke of a particular General in the English Army who was out flanked by German troops. Most people thought that he would evacuate his men. Yet, he simply stayed put and dug in. He refused to give in. This in turn heightened the morale of the English Army who sent in reinforcements. I forget the details now, but that particular battle ended up being decisive in the final victory of allied troops in WWII.

We often give too much weight to obstacles in our minds. When they are really not as formidable as they may seem. I think of David and Goliath. "Look at that giant. Look at that Giant Army. There is no way to win this."

We all have a tendency to focus on the negative, whether it is a person, a relationship, or an organization. That is why bad news sells. And that is why if someone gives us a compliment we forget about it in a minute. But, if someone criticizes us, we remember it for hours, if not days and weeks. It is precisely because of this phenomena that it is so powerful to focus on the positive. It realigns our whole person and our whole approach to life. Given the rampant negativity in our world today, genuinely focusing on the positive is a revolutionary act. There is so much power in focusing on the positive. And it does change everything.

In my short life I have experienced suffering and joy, highs and lows, ups and downs, good times, and bad times. And like you, I have witnessed the myriad tragedies that have afflicted the human family in the last few years, from 9/11, to the war in Afghanistan, to the war in Iraq, to the Tsunami, to Hurricane Katrina.

Yet through it all I will say to you that life is good. This is something that I feel through and through. And it makes all the difference in the world. I declare that in spite of it all and I mean all of it, the clogged sink, the delinquent child, the dull pain that never goes away, the problems at work, financial problems, the problems at home, the problems in the world. In spite of it all, I am happy to be alive. In spite of it all, I sing out praises to God. God is good! Life is good!

During graduate school in Chicago my teachers often asked ministers to affirm their core belief in sermons! They say, don't preach your doubts. Preach your beliefs. Well, this is my core belief—that life is good. This is what I want to celebrate in worship on Sunday mornings.

When I think of hardships people have had in their life, few compare to the turmoil of King David. King David's very own son, Absalom, betrayed him. Then by cunning and political maneuvering Absalom took command of half of David's army and drove him out of his castle. David and his comrades were forced to go into hiding and fend for themselves in the wilderness. I can't think of anything worse than your very own son trying to kill you.

Yet after all he has been through, David sings psalms of praise in the temple. He dances before the Ark of the Covenant. He plays the harp and the trumpet. He sings his heart out. David cannot get enough of worship. At every turn he is writing songs and praising the living God. So many of the Psalms David wrote were songs of praise.

The psalms of David we read this morning are songs of celebration and joy. And this is the essence of worship—singing out and praising the living God! This is what feeds our souls like nothing else.

In the field of Psychology it is commonly understood that the basis of a well-adjusted adult requires an affirmation by the age of 12. It is by that age that a youth affirm that life is good or not. If an adolescent can affirm life is good, with all sincerity and honesty, the foundation has been set for the rest of his or her life. And they are on the road to optimum psychological health. But, if because of abuse or trauma, they are not able to make this affirmation, they are on the road to disequilibrium and poor psychological health. In fact, psychologists are now telling us that in order for many maladjusted people to turn the corner, blossom, and thrive, they will have to go back to their adolescence and work through whatever kept them from affirming that life is good.

Now, if David can affirm in the psalms that life is good, even after his son drives him out and tries to kill him, then all of us with soul searching and trust can come around to affirming life is good.

This is an essential affirmation that is the basis of the Psalms and the New Testament. This essential affirmation is also the basis of healthy ministries throughout the country. And this is the basic attitude of so many people in our church. I am encouraged by people in our church. So many remain so positive, despite failing health and challenging circumstances. For so many in the church, it doesn't matter what is going on in their life....they are always positive. There a couple of people I visited in the hospital recently. And their remarks were all about the flowers, how beautiful it is outside now, the beautiful trees outside, a garden she loves to visit. Family—so lucky to have each family member in their lives. They always have something positive to say and mean it from the bottom of their hearts.

What these people and others convey in their mannerisms and in their very presence is reflected in the timeless affirmations of faith throughout the Bible.

The essence of faith is believing that God is indeed good and that life is good. This faith moves mountains. This faith keeps us when everything else is topsy-turvy. As Proverbs tells us this faith is sweeter than honey and is more valuable than pure gold.

Our faith is built on praise. This faith is built on the jubilant spirit of David, who shouted praises to God throughout the psalms. That is what we are about. That is what Easter is about. Let us not hold back. Let us proclaim it.

Life is indeed good—a sacred and beautiful thing.

And God is good and to be praised with all of our hearts and souls.

Amen.