

“The Four Disciplines of the Abundant Life” Easter 4 5/11/14

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The late Fr. Anthony de Mello, Jesuit priest and spiritual teacher told this story:

A Quaker had this sign put on a vacant piece of land next to his home: “This land will be given to anyone who is truly satisfied.”

A wealthy farmer, who was riding by, stopped to read the sign and said to himself, “Since our friend the Quaker is so ready to part with this plot, I might as well claim it before someone else does. I am a rich man and have all I need, so I certainly qualify.”

With that he went up to the door and explained what he was there for. The Quaker asked him, “Art thou truly satisfied?”

The rich man replied, “I am indeed, for I have everything that I need.”

“Friend,” said the Quaker, “if thou art satisfied, what dost thou need the land for?”

(taken from the May 11, 2014 edition of *Synthesis*)

I told this story to raise the question among us, “Are we truly satisfied?
Are YOU truly satisfied? Am I truly satisfied?”

The reason I raise the question this morning is that one can make the case not only from today’s passage, but from all of the Holy Scriptures that it is God’s desire that God’s people, ie, you and I be satisfied or content or happy or whatever word we want to use to describe it.

In fact I remember reading years ago that the watchword for the East African revival was, “Jesus satisfies.”

And I have to say, after 61 years of life and 31 years as a priest in the Church, I am convinced that the truth is that it is God’s desire that God’s people be satisfied or content and that the East African Church was correct in saying that Jesus satisfies.

Are you satisfied with your life? The next question is, “If not, do you want to be satisfied with your life?” If the answer is yes, then this 2,000 year old Christian faith has a deal for you!

Listen to what Jesus says in the last 2 lines of today’s Gospel. “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they (meaning his followers) may have life, and have it abundantly.” Here, Jesus is promising abundant life to his followers. He is also acknowledging evil in this world.

But, despite all of the evil in the world, Jesus has come promising us an abundant life. In another place in this Gospel, Jesus said, "I came that my joy may be in you (again meaning his followers) and that your joy may be full or complete." Joy is that deep and abiding contentment that is not dependent on our circumstances in life. Whereas happiness may depend on life's circumstances, joy does not; joy runs deeper.

We hear it put another way by Saint Paul, the Apostle, and we often use this as part of the blessing near the end of worship, "May the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God." Saint Paul is saying that we have a peace that passes all understanding. He is saying we have a peace that doesn't make sense because we have it in the midst of a world where greed and violence and every form of evil that we can imagine seek to encroach upon our peace.

Are you and I experiencing some level of satisfaction or peace and contentment in our lives? If we are followers of Jesus, He is saying that we should be. We should be, because this is what He and the rest of the Scriptures promise to those who are serving the living God.

We should be, because He is the Good Shepherd or gate for the sheep. Scholars tell us that sometimes first century sheep pens had openings to let the sheep in and out, but no gate. Therefore, the shepherd became the gate at night as he lay down across the entrance of the sheepfold, keeping the sheep in, and predators out.

In the morning, the shepherd wakes up, and calls to the sheep and they follow Him because they know His voice. The Gospel text is careful to say that they will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of a stranger."

Beloved, we have cacophony of voices in this world clamoring for our attention. It's no wonder that we find it so hard to find the abundant life which Jesus promises us.

As Christ followers in this day and time, as in every day and time, there are things that we can do to make sure that we are hearing and following the Good Shepherd's voice. Remember that we are followers or disciples of our Risen Lord. He is very much alive in us and ready and willing to direct us by His Spirit. We just have to learn to listen for His voice among the many voices. How do we do this?

Well, this is not going to be big news for you if you have been a follower of Jesus for a while. As His followers, we are disciples and the word disciple has the same root as the word, discipline.

After 2,000 years of being the Church, we know that there are tested and proven disciplines that assist us in hearing the voice of Jesus among so many voices.

It is unfortunate that I couldn't come up with a better acronym than this, but bear with me for a moment. We all know that the acronym WASP has been used for white anglo saxon protestant.

However, the acronym which I want you to leave here with today is WASPS, the plural form of the word, wasp. Sorry, but it's the best I could do. Wasps. This time of year we see them everywhere don't we? Tis the season. They are building their nests wherever they can find a place. So, when you think about the balance of the disciplines of our Christian faith, think of wasps. In fact, think of it and write it in lower case letters to distinguish it from the other acronym. When you see wasps flying around this summer, think about, Oh yeah, that describes the disciplines of our faith.

The words which go with these letters are:

w for worship,

a for and

s for study

p for prayer

s for service

5 letters which spell wasps, help us remember the 4 important disciplines of our faith: worship, and, study, prayer, and these all lead to the last word which is service, following the example of our Servant Lord.

This word wasps will help us live in to the life, the abundant life, the satisfied life that Jesus has for us as His followers. And really, worship and study, prayer and service are the disciplines we employ to develop faith or trust in God.

(For the animal lovers, on this day that we bless the animals, one could use the word "paws" recognizing that the s stands for both study and service.)

Trust is the key. When we really learn to trust God with everything in our lives, things begin to fall into place. I quoted Job recently who summed up faith or trust by saying, "Even if God slays me, yet will I trust Him." Let's consider each of those four disciplines very briefly.

1. Worshipping God whenever we can, privately and as a community of faith.

2. Studying God's word by reading the Scripture passage from the Forward Day by Day every day.
3. Taking time out to pray as we greet the day, "Lord, please make me a blessing and love others through me this day, in Jesus' Name and thanking God for the day as we retire.
4. Last, but perhaps most importantly serving God by serving those around me, especially those who are having trouble making it in this world.

It all leads to faith or trust in our loving and gracious God. What is the acronym again that helps us remember the disciplines of our faith? The acronym is wasps. Remember it when you see them flying around. What do the letters stand for? Worship and Study, Prayer, Service.

Speaking of trusting God. I have a fond memory that is to this day a little frightening that illustrates trust. When I was a little kid, we went up to Mount Mitchell and I remember climbing the tower with my dad. When we got to the top, the sides of the observation deck were too high for me to see over. So, my dad picked me up and sat me on the wall so that I could see. At first, I was really scared, but as I felt my dad's powerful arms around me, I knew that I could trust him to keep me safe. So, I settled down and was able to enjoy the view.

Returning now to where we started, Are you satisfied with your life?"

If the answer is yes, I would be willing to venture that it has something to do with your relationship with God.

If the answer is no, I would be willing to venture that it has something to do with your relationship with God.

As we embrace these 4 disciplines each day, we will learn to trust God. The more we trust God, the more we can let go of our fears and live our lives in God, knowing that no matter what happens, we are safely cradled in the strong arms of God. From that vantage point, in the strong arms of God, we can be truly satisfied, and enjoy this abundant life that the Good Shepherd has for us.

Please encourage me as I will encourage you to work the 4 disciplines which we can remember with the word, wasps: w-a-s-p-s
 worship and study, prayer, service, daily whenever possible, that we may be truly satisfied as we follow the Servant Jesus with and in our lives.

(At 11:15, only)

And of course, it's these four disciplines that we, the Church, and her parents, godparents and grandparents will be teaching little Helen Dean as she grows in her faith in Christ. It is our prayer this morning that she will know the joy of the abundant life as she learns from those who love her what it means to follow Jesus in her life. Amen.