

05 July 2020: Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30 (Proper 9)

I remember those late summer, stifling hot days of childhood: nothing satisfied or sounded exciting, everything was boring. Parents were no help. If I complained they ordered, “Find something to do!” as if I had not tried. What is behind this childish contrariness? A French word fits: “ennui.” Ennui is boredom, dissatisfaction, listlessness, world-weariness. It results in the demand that someone entertain or distract us. In advanced cases whining self-pity becomes a diversion.

I think Jesus has this in mind when he uses the image of children calling to one another—let’s play wedding: ‘No!’ let’s play funeral: ‘No!’ Jesus likens his opponents to belligerent children; nothing pleases them. Yet be careful: it is convenient to think of Jesus’ opponents as standard villains in a melodrama—the Darth Vader’s of the New Testament. That is a mistake.

Consider your own spiritual maturity. During times of spiritual ennui—we all have them—does a rebellious, contrary spirit rise to the surface? Are you grumpy with both the challenges to lead a more disciplined, balanced life *and* with the Church’s grace and acceptance of sinners?

Jesus calls us to spiritual maturity. Begin with surrendering yourself to God, not as you think God is or want God to be, but as God knows himself to be. Here I borrow from C.S. Lewis’ *Screwtape Letters*. Insisting that God be as I insist God be is a sign of immaturity. The reason is unconditional love. As Christians we believe God loves unconditionally. You may have doubts, but the assumption is nevertheless crucial to our faith. We also believe we are called to love other people unconditionally. Parents get a lot of practice at that. Yet have you ever considered that we are also called to love *God* unconditionally, that is, loving God because God is God, not because God meets our standards? The practical result of loving God unconditionally is that we grow in our experience of God. Otherwise, we have a small theology. God’s Being is endless, beyond our expectations, comprehension, and reason, and we are on a journey into that boundless Reality.

Next, remember this: each day you have a three-fold purpose: to be loved by God more fully, to give yourself more fully to God in love, and to share God’s mercy and loving-kindness with others. This is our purpose, whether today is a wedding or a funeral—a day of triumph or failure, or boredom—one’s purpose remains: be loved by God more fully, give yourself more fully to God in love, and share God’s loving-kind mercy. Live your purpose, whatever the day brings.

Here is number three. “This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it” (Ps 118). Begin each day giving thanks. “Lord, thank you for giving me another day of life...”, and continue from there. Such gratitude for each new day, and the blessings of one’s life remind us that there is no other, better time to be loved by God and share such love. Yesterday is gone, tomorrow is unknown. Today is the day!

Next is this: each day God yearns to draw you to Himself. Whatever happens today is an opportunity to surrender yourself more completely to God and is an occasion for awe and wonder. Everything that happens to you is the context to love more fully and be loved more fully. It is especially important to remember this in times of hardship and challenge. We want to know how this debacle or that tragedy can possibly be a path to God. Many times, we will not know the why or how of God’s mercy. Yet those with spiritual maturity know times of darkness and dryness are as crucial to our progress. Will you yet ask God to teach you to love when there is little obvious reason to do so?

Finally, living today with hope and trust in God is faith in action. Do you trust God with your honor, happiness, well-being, your life? Do you trust that indeed nothing in heaven or on earth or in the realm of spiritual darkness and violence will ever separate you from the love of God in Jesus Christ? Trust is faith in action.

We do have a choice. God gives us the freedom. Anyone can waste life in sullen discontent, punctuated with counterfeit pleasures, an occasional thimble-full of dissipating distraction. Or you may grow up and know true joy. It does not seem like much of a choice: let us grow up into Christ. Amen.