

Preaching Series – “The Serenity Prayer” - Part 5: “Living One Day at a Time; Enjoying One Moment at a Time.”

Psalm 118:24 and Matthew 6:25-34

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A Sermon Preached by Rev. Dr. Ivan H.M. Peden Copyright: 2017, I. Peden

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In our sermon series on *The Serenity Prayer* we come now to a part of the prayer that is less well-known but just as meaningful. Today for the first time in our liturgy we read the full version of the prayer. Part 5 of this series is entitled *Living One Day at a Time; Enjoying One Moment at a Time*.

Matthew’s gospel, chapters 5-7, contain a block of Jesus’ teaching that biblical scholars call Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount.” In chapter 6 we have a record of Jesus addressing the anxiety some people feel about their future. In verse 34 Jesus makes this incredible stress-busting statement for handling life in today’s highly stressful environment. Jesus says this about worry and about tomorrow: “Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” (Matt. 6:34). The positive spin on this saying of Jesus was captured by Reinhold Niebuhr when he composed *The Serenity Prayer* and used the words “Living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time.”

As an introduction to this topic, I offer four reasons why we should follow Jesus’ teaching not to worry about tomorrow...four reasons to live one day at a time:

1. Because we can’t control tomorrow.
2. Because there is enough trouble for today.
3. Because today will never come back.
4. Because God will provide tomorrow’s need.

A first step towards living one day at a time is *learning not to listen to our fears*. When we are anxious about our future and feel paralyzed with fear, a turning point can come when we learn to stop listening to our fears. I know that sounds simple, but of course it isn’t. We need to learn to stop arguing with our thoughts; to stop chasing down all the possibilities; to stop trying to come up with all the answers. We must learn rather to say, “Yes, that’s interesting: another anxious thought, another fear. But I choose not to listen. I choose not to engage.” The solution for a disciple of Jesus is to learn to give my fears to God rather than to force myself to face them. We will have to grit our teeth and do this over many months, but the fears will gradually subside. They will still nudge us when we are under stress. But we will no longer pay attention,

and eventually they will disappear relatively quickly.

A second step towards living one day at a time is *learning to be thankful for the blessings of each day*. Listen ... We always have a choice: to live out our years anticipating and fearing the worst; or to live out our years enjoying what we have right now. Now there's no great moral superiority in choosing the second option. The truth is that in some ways it's not a choice at all; it's a psychological necessity. More than that, it's an answer to prayer.

In the book which we are using to explore *The Serenity Prayer*, Trevor Hudson states that children have a great capacity for saying thank you for the good things in their lives. "If we are fortunate," he writes in chapter 6 of his book, "we can rediscover the capacity for saying thank-you before we die. We become like little children again [as Jesus taught us], appreciating the goodness of God in every good thing we experience. We fill the present moment with spontaneous expressions of gratitude and thankfulness." That helps us live in the present. What happens when we are thankful is that God and circumstances teach us to leave the future in the future, and enjoy and thank God for the blessings of right now.

A third step to learning to live one day at a time is *learning to trust in God's enabling grace for each day*. Most days there's more than we can easily handle. We're not strong enough for the duties of each day. We need to learn what it means to live each day in God's enabling grace with the help and strength that God gives for the next task, the next hour, or the next moment. Not to think about tomorrow (except if preparation and planning for tomorrow happen to be the duties of today), not to wonder how we are going to face it, but to trust that God will give us strength to do the tasks God gives us today, tomorrow, and the next day, and the day after that, not now, not in advance, but as we come to each day.

Trevor Hudson began his fifth chapter, *Living One Day at a Time*, with a reminder of the great value of making **daily resolutions**. Hudson writes: "We are much more accustomed to making annual resolutions than daily ones. While we obviously need to develop yearly plans for our lives, we can also learn to make each day a New Year's Day. Each day then becomes a new beginning of new beginnings."

At the end of a day when we have made a couple of daily resolutions, Hudson urges us to have a **nightly review**. He says the nightly review is another habit that can help us live one day at a time. The review process has three simple steps: First, making some time to be quiet for a

few moments. It helps to take a few breaths to settle down ...to invite God to be with you ...and to shed light on the past day. Second, ask God to bring to mind one moment of the day for which you are most grateful, the moment that gave you the most life or when you received or gave the most love. Relive that moment. Breathe in again the gratitude you felt and thank God for it. Third, ask God to bring to mind the moment you are least thankful for, the moment that drained you of life or when you received or gave the least love. Reflect on what was said or done that made it so hard. Refrain from judging yourself. Share these feelings with God and let God's love fill you again.

Who of us can deny there have been times when we have felt like saying, "I am not strong enough to face today let alone the next week, or the next month, or the next year. But God is strong. God promises to give me what I need to keep trusting and serving God, moment by moment, day by day, whatever my circumstances. That's how I face the future: not anticipating and preparing for every eventuality, but enjoying God's gifts for today, and trusting God that, whatever God has in store, God will provide what I need to face it."

Sadly, many people are either living with regret over the past or with anxiety over the future. For those living with regret over the past, the apostle Paul says in Philippians 3:13, "But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind....I press on.", while for those worrying over their future he says, "Do not be anxious about anything" and then encourages them to pray and to trust in the power of God. (Philippians 4:6).

It is true that each day has troubles of its own, but in Psalm 68:19, God is revealed as the Lord "who daily bears our burdens," and Jesus, in the Lord's Prayer, taught us to pray, "Give us today our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11).

I wonder what troubles you are facing today. What are you worrying about? A quick read through of Matthew 6:25-34, where Jesus speaks against worry, will act as a powerful faith booster and a stress-buster! So, do not let the worries of tomorrow affect your relationship with God today. Let's live one day at a time in God's enabling grace.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.