

Dear Friends

Today is a gift, that is why it is called the present.
---line from the children's movie "Kung Fu Panda"

It is no secret that I find there is a whole lot of wisdom in books and movies for children. I am more likely to quote the eminent philosopher Winnie-the-Pooh than I am Kierkegaard (though I have read both). Every once in a while you come across something in children's literature and entertainment that you just know you are going to hold onto forever. Such is the case for the line above from "Kung Fu Panda".

It returned to my consciousness yesterday as I was contemplating the times in which we are living. Reflecting on the profound difficulty facing our health care system in Manitoba, and the daily reports of struggles in mental health, fear, and anxiety, I sense that the *we-are-in-this-together* approach to the pandemic is wearing thin in some places. You can tell by the emergence of finger pointing and how blaming and shaming seem to be on the rise. You can hear it in the frustrated voices of officials who keep us informed daily about the spread of the virus and are not sure just what message is needed to reverse the trend. I know I was quite angered myself by the contrarians who gathered last weekend in defiance of public health orders to bear false witness about freedom and responsibility to our neighbours (the ones who invoke God to justify their selfishness really get under my skin).

While trying to avoid the pitfalls of foolish optimism, I hope we can encourage one another in these difficult days by turning to a touchstone of Christian spirituality which is, stay in the present. You find this wisdom expressed in a variety of ways. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says "do not be anxious about tomorrow; tomorrow will look after itself". In the Lord's Prayer we ask "give us this day our daily bread". Most significantly, Psalm 118 says "This is the day God has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it."

Staying in the present is one of the true gifts of our tradition. Christian life is not centred on preserving the past though we have received and honour a wondrous heritage. Nor should it be centred on a future realm disconnected from our present reality. The power in our faith derives from 'incarnation', the ancient testimony that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The Word was experienced in the personhood of Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit, now dwells among you and I... here...today...in the present.

But you may rightfully ask how we do this. Here are a few suggestions to help you stay in the present if you are finding that difficult:

1. Welcome the day with gratitude – literally, when you wake, give thanks for the gift of a new day
2. Be kind to yourself – whatever you do in the course of the day, remember that is enough
3. Be kind to others – our respective communities are smaller these days but a phone call or a kind word makes a world of difference
4. Turn off the anxiety of others – especially those on TV
5. Read – visiting other worlds couldn't hurt
6. Listen – to music, to nature, to the still, small voice within
7. Breathe – this will end and we will be well
8. Close the day with gratitude – literally give thanks for what has been today

Today is a gift. I am thankful that you are sharing yours with me.

Grace and peace,

Michael