

Rev Tim Perkins
Sept 3rd 2020

“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature...make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”(2 Peter 1: 3 - 9)

Dear Friends,

The last time I wrote to you I quoted these words from Dallas Willard's book, 'Life without lack:'
“There are three things that must be working within us before we can truly experience the sufficiency of God: faith, death to self, and agape love. These three combine to create a triangle of sufficiency in our lives. When faith, death to self, and love are alive in you, you will find that hope and joy pervade your entire life as a natural result. Each one is a gift from God, and our privilege and calling is to become the kind of people who can receive these gifts and work with God to develop them as we learn to live a life without lack.”

I focussed my thoughts then on the first of the three qualities mentioned: faith. Today, I want to think briefly about the second, death to self, and its role in leading us towards the life without lack or fear that David spoke of in Psalm 23.

I really just want to suggest to you that you spend some time this week meditating on the words from 2 Peter quoted above. These words speak of the process of dying to self because they are about gradually replacing the narratives and habits of the kingdom of this world which so form who we have become, with the narratives and habits of the Kingdom of God as revealed by Jesus in his life, teaching, death and resurrection.

But it is important to also note that the Christian faith speaks of “death to self”, not “death of self!” The distinction between the two is vital for us to maintain. Death to self is not, as Willard puts it, “ultimately a negation, but a rising up into the very life of God.” Our lives become saved and transformed by His life. Death to self is not about getting rid of yourself. You were put on this planet in order specifically to *be* a self, and to live fully as a self. The worth of the self – of your self – is inestimable. And it is God's great intent for you to become a fully realised self as you journey through the grace-filled process of death to self and life in Christ.

In Matthew 16, Jesus speaks of the need for his disciples to deny themselves and take up their cross. Does that mean denying that you exist? Of course not. Does it mean that we should think of ourselves as worthless? To do so makes no sense of all that Jesus went through to save us. So what does it mean? I think it means that our natural human inclinations are to journey through life pursuing the wrong things. Think of the countless examples of often very wealthy individuals who have reached a certain stage in their life and it has suddenly dawned upon them that they have dedicated their entire working life to the pursuit of wealth in the belief that it will make them happy and satisfy their souls. They have missed the point of what life is really all about – being in deep, healthy, fulfilling relationships with God and with other people. And they have done so in the misguided belief that building their wealth, the influence, their power, their kingdom will bring the fulfilment which the human soul so needs.

Whether we are wealthy or not, we all face those same temptations and it is exactly that sort of life which St Peter challenges us to move away from in his letter, as we seek instead the true pathway towards fulfilment – which is not satisfying our ever desire but living life in the knowledge that we are loved by our Creator, and allowing that knowledge and that experience of God's love to change the way we live in this world. Dying to self is simply then about aligning our priorities, our thoughts, our will and our actions, with God's. As we become more adept at doing that we will then begin to realise that we are people in whom Jesus Christ dwells and that we are living inside a kingdom which can never be shaken no matter what earthly situations we face. That, I think, is what David means when he says, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want...even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil."

Faith in the goodness of God coupled with the desire to replace our own earthly narratives with those of God's kingdom are the first two steps in our journey towards a life without lack. We shall consider how that works out in practice next week. But for now, I encourage you to meditate on the words from 2 Peter and to ask yourself, "where am I on that journey of transitioning from a life influenced by the kingdom of this world to one influenced by the kingdom of God?" What aspect of your daily life or your character do you need to focus on this week as you seek to become more like Christ? Invite Jesus, through the Holy Spirit to give you opportunities to develop: faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, mutual affection and love.

Every Blessing,

Rev Tim

Notices

Circuit Service

I am delighted to say that next Sunday (13th) we shall be holding our first Circuit Service since February! It will take place via the Zoom platform and will be led by Rev Roger Smith and Deacon Jenny Parnell. It will be an opportunity for us to engage in worship together and to begin to reconnect relationships with folk from across the whole Circuit. Further details will be provided in next week's pastoral letter about how to access the service. It would be great to have as many participants as possible.

Golden Wedding Anniversary

It is good to be able to share some positive news in these letters from time to time so I am delighted to be able to let you know that Mary and John Wood will be celebrating their Golden Wedding Anniversary on Sat 12th Sept. Mary and John are known to many folk in Burley and Menston not just through their involvement in Burley Methodist Church and Sts Fisher More RC Church, but also through their dedication to the work of Christian Aid and the Burley-Tereli Friendship Trust. I understand that they were blessed to have been married by Rev Donald English, one of the great preachers and leaders of the Methodist Church in the 20th century (and a one time player for Leicester City!) Our best wishes and prayers go to Mary and John alongside a true thankfulness for all they do as citizens of the Kingdom of God.