

Sittin' on the Dock of the Bay John 14:1-4, 27  
 Saint Marks United Methodist Church, Charleston, WV  
 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost (September 7) 2014

John 14:1-4, 27

Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many mansions. *If it were not so*, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going. ... **Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.**

Today is the last of the summer topical sermon series. Next week we begin a three-week series on "Home to Harmony." I thank the worship committee for their continuing work of collaborative inspiration. The topic for today is "How to deal with Stress."

Stress is one of, if not THE, most important factors in our life style to impact upon our physical and spiritual health – having significant impact on heart, blood pressure, diabetes, ulcers, and numerous other health conditions.

From the Truth-in-Advertising Department, please know that I cannot give you the cure for the stress that may afflict you, in a mere 15 minutes. Today I can only raise some starting points, some suggested behavioral changes, patterns, practices. But, as I will mention at the end of today's homily, even if I had 2-1/2 hours to preach, a mere homily simply won't make a difference.

TWO POINTS TO BEGIN:

**(1)** Singing today's homily title song along with Otis Redding (with the words printed on the tear off strip of the bulletin) will not reduce your stress significantly. A reading of those lyrics will likely convince you, however, that the circumstances therein sung are mostly related to a drug-induced-stupefied life style that (a) aren't realistic, and (b) won't work. When I spoke of this point to my daughter on the

telephone, she responded: “But, Dad, isn’t that the mental condition of most of the song writers of your generation?” (Ah, these kids, today!)

No, Otis’ “Sittin on the Dock of the Bay” won’t give you significant stress relief – even if it might be a nice thing to do for a day or two on vacation – because it is all CIRCUMSTANTIALLY BASED. And (as today’s scripture remembers Jesus telling His disciples) peace -- or stress reduction – that is based on what the world gives/situational, will not have any lasting value. The world giveth, and the world taketh away.

As much as we worship the god of self-determination and choice in today’s world, there is too much that is simply beyond our control. Jesus offers a stress reduction that is beyond circumstantial peace.

## **(2) DO YOU REALLY WANT PEACE?**

Oh, we say we do, but DO WE – REALLY?

Are we willing to make the changes that bring real release from stress. (And, no, I’m not talking about dropping out of life and going to live in a cave?) Are we really willing to make the changes necessary to receive the ***Stress Reduction that Jesus promises?***

In the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of John, Jesus encounters a man who was seeking a healing. Before Jesus took any action, he asked the man if he really wanted to be healed. “Harsh?” you ask. Well, let me add in one other factor: the man had been trying the very same course of behavior designed to heal him – FOR 38 YEARS, WITHOUT SUCCESS. Jesus was not out of line, to say: ***Really?! How’s that working for you? Do you REALLY want to be healed?***

Are you still stressed out, after how long?

Really? Do you REALLY want to be healed of your stress ... or do you secretly like it? Many folks claim to want to be cured of something, but prefer the suffering they know to a cure they do not know.

Do you really WANT to be healed.

**(3) OK, preamble aside: now the meat of the homily: so what do we do for this Jesus-Stress-Reduction?**

**CHANGE HOW YOU THINK.**

**If you can worry, if you can stress, then you can meditate.**

Both involve the same process – constant repetition of thought about the very same thing.

The difference is that Meditation is focuses upon, and is open ended to, what God can do to heal your circumstances.

In order to **FOCUS UPON GOD'S HANDLING** instead of on worrying you have to practice **ONE THING: SET YOUR MIND.**

Let me explain by example: Sacinandana Swami tells the story of a Native American Indian visiting a resident of New York City.

They are walking in Times Square, when the Indian says, **"I hear a cricket."** His friend says, **"you must be crazy; you can't hear a cricket in the midst of all this noise!"**

The Native American stopped and listened carefully for a minute and then walked a few feet away to a cement planter filled with shrubs. He looked under the branches, and sure enough, there was the cricket. His Big Apple friend was amazed. **"Buddy, you have Superman ears!"**

**"No, it just depends on what is important to you,"** said the Indian. Then he reached into his pocket and pulled out a handful of change, and tossed it onto the sidewalk. Even though the noise of Time Square had not changed, lots of heads within a several feet radius – as far as they had been from the cricket when the Indian heard it – turned and looked to see if *they* had been the ones to drop their money.

**SETTING YOUR MIND** is a **life focus** based on what is important to you.

I read once of an adventure-seeking-junkie who had gone spelunking (cave exploring) with a guide.

The cave ceiling got so low that the two spelunkers were down on their backs, pushing themselves forward with their feet. They got the point where they could only go in one direction; there was not room to change course. If they did not find the promised room soon, they would be stuck, and would die there. The adrenalin junkie was so fearful he could not move.

The guide, who understood these things, said to him: ***I know you are very afraid right now. You have to trust me; a short bit more and we will be in that big wonderful place I described before we entered this cave. You will thank me for showing it to you. What you must do, in order to continue is to focus on my voice. Do not think of anything else; just focus on my voice as I talk you the rest of the way toward our destination. Can you do that? Just focus on my voice.***

It was the only thing that would work. The first-timer had to focus on the guide's voice and nothing else, in order to function, to reach his goal, to survive.

In order to do this – *to turn your eyes upon Jesus, to look full to His wonderful face* – requires that we **GIVE UP A SENSE OF VICTIMHOOD**. How often we feel like whatever thoughts run across the screen in their heads are beyond their control.

The woman said, "I'm in love with him. He's married. I know it's wrong, but I just can't help it."

Well – in a word: YES! You can help it. You can pray and ask God to help you reset your heart. You could spend an hour every day for a month with women who have lost their husbands to infidelity. Listen to their stories. Look into the eyes of their children. Hear the betrayal. See a broken promise through their eyes. YES, you really can think new thoughts. Don't claim victimhood and loss of control.

**(4) Don't worry alone. You need a spiritual friend.** From an insight given me in prayer, as noted in my journal back in May of this year: **The only way to**

**keep a cracked vessel full is to (a) fix the crack, or (b) keep it under the tap.**

The problem with this is that you have to pick between (a) and (b). You can't fix the crack while it's under running water. And when **you** are the vessel, you can't step back from yourself to see where the water is leaking out.

Our problem with worry, so often, is that we aren't really able to understand what part of our life is fractured. All we know is that something is cracked. Oh, our worry may present itself at work, but is it really work, or is it home, or faith, or financial, or what? All we know is that we have a sense of stress, anger, fatigue, malaise, on a treadmill that we can't turn off (the stress of the running faucet trying to keep us full), and it becomes a problem in all parts of our life.

We need a *anam cara* – a *spiritual friend* – who knows us, who loves us, who can help us find the area that needs the help, to eliminate the stress fracture. Someone whose voice we can listen to, to help us receive the healing balm of Jesus.

Do you have such a friend?

**(5)** Finally – the 5<sup>th</sup> point in what are supposed to be a 3 point talk – but I left out a poem. This is the point that I mentioned at the beginning.

**NO AMOUNT OF INFORMATION will change the stress in your life.** Not only must you **want** to be healed; you can't be healed until you **DO SOMETHING** about it, **for a time**. **Wanting to run a marathon, and reading a book about it, won't equip you to do it.**

The stress relief that Jesus offers is one that is based on a history of trusting in God, not in circumstances – the God who is faithful in ALL circumstances. Before you can listen to, and focus upon a Voice that you can trust, you have to have had experiences where trusting in Jesus has worked.

- Times when it looked bad in the moment, but later when you looked into the rear view mirror, you were able to see that Jesus was with you all along.

- Times when it seemed bad, but looking into the rear view mirror, you saw the truth of Romans 8:28: ***All things work together for good for those who love God and who are called according to God's purpose.***

So – you've got to have done it, in order to get it.

Or – to reshape the words I mentioned last week that Count Zinzendorf gave to John Wesley:

***Focus on Jesus' Voice and Peace until you get it.  
Then Focus upon Jesus' Voice and Peace, because you've got it.***

And, ***please***, do it with a spiritual friend.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.