

Year A, November 12, 2017
23 Pentecost (Proper 27)
Christ Church, Mexia

Leo Buscaglia told a Buddhist koan (a paradoxical anecdote or riddle) about a man running from a bear. He came to a cliff and was faced with a decision – if he stood there the bear would certainly kill him, if he jumped the fall would most likely kill him. So, he jumped. But as he was falling, he saw a bush sticking out from the cliff and he grabbed it. Safe he thought. Then he noticed a tiger pacing impatiently at the bottom of the cliff waiting for him to complete his fall. It was then that he noticed two gophers who were chewing on the roots of the bush that was holding him. But he also noticed some strawberries growing near the hole where the gophers were, and he reached out, picked one, ate it and exclaimed, “How delicious!”

So, what are we to make of this story? Be present in the moment! In other words, be mindful. Mindfulness has long been an integral part of Christianity. As Anthony De Mello, a Jesuit priest, reminded us, the primary aspect of spiritual life is to wake up. “Keep awake” is the message Jesus brings to us today in the parable of the ten maidens. The kingdom of God is near; you never know when it will touch you, when God will speak to you, so stay awake. At other times he exhorts his disciples and others to let those with ears, hear; those who have eyes, see.

But here’s the rub. Like the man in the koan, we are usually remembering what’s behind us – the past, or we are worried about what’s coming – the future, and we miss the present. We are not tuned to, nor do we appreciate what is happening now. We are not living in the moment – we miss eating that strawberry and realizing how delicious it is.

According to Amy Oden in her book, *Right Here, Right Now*, “Christian mindfulness practice is rooted in the most basic witness of Jesus: God with us, right here, right now.”

She reminds us, as I have already partially addressed, of “...the tendency in American culture to rush through daily life at a breathless pace from one thing to the next, as we jump mentally ahead to the next thing while doing this one. We reply to emails and update our calendars while sitting in a meeting at work. We multitask our way through the day and pull into the driveway with no memory of driving

home. We are numbed by overstimulation and continually preoccupied. We are never truly present to the moment we are actually living." In such a world, where is our relationship with God, our awareness of God?

I think we may tend to associate mindfulness with Buddhism or other eastern religions, but it has long been a part of Christianity. And as Amy suggests it may be better if we talk about our mindfulness as "the practice of paying prayerful attention in the present moment to God's abundant life." Prayerful doesn't mean saying prayers in our normal mode; it means being ourselves, our true selves, not the ones we sometimes pretend to be – open to God; being nonjudgmental and open-hearted, accepting whatever may come to us. And remember, Jesus, God, always meets us where we are, especially in our times of need.

I spoke of this a few weeks ago; Christian life is not a dogma or a disembodied set of principles or laws, it is a way of life – a transformed life. The practice of mindfulness helps us to understand and achieve this way of living. And it offers many benefits. Amy Oden suggests five: 1) we become free from reactivity/knee-jerk reactions to what happens in our lives or from the anxieties we harbor and we can hear God speaking to us better, 2) we can lead real lives, rather than the fake lives where we strive to project that we are something we aren't, 3) we are more rooted in God, more centered, allowing us to rest in the wholeness that God provides, 4) we are more grateful, and we are able to see how much we have rather than how much we don't have; we become inoculated against the negative messages of our culture that continually tell us that what we have is not enough, and 5) our hearts become more open to others and compassion becomes a mark for our lives, because we are free, real, rooted and grateful.

In other words, we can have life, and have it more abundantly. This is God's hope for us, God's gift to us. "A life that is real, not fake. A life that is true, not false. A life awake in the present moment, not stuck in the past or fixated on the future. A life that is whole, not fragmented. A life that is rooted, not scattered. A life that is connected to those we love, not disembodied in distraction. A life grounded by love, not anxiety or fear." (Oden, p 2) Isn't that the kind of life you would like to have?

Last week I spoke to you about humility. Archbishop William Temple once said: "The source of humility is the habit of realizing the presence

of God.” Yet another reason to be mindful. So practice mindfulness, in order to be humble, to be one with God, and to enjoy an abundant life.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word, and the Spirit.

Amen.