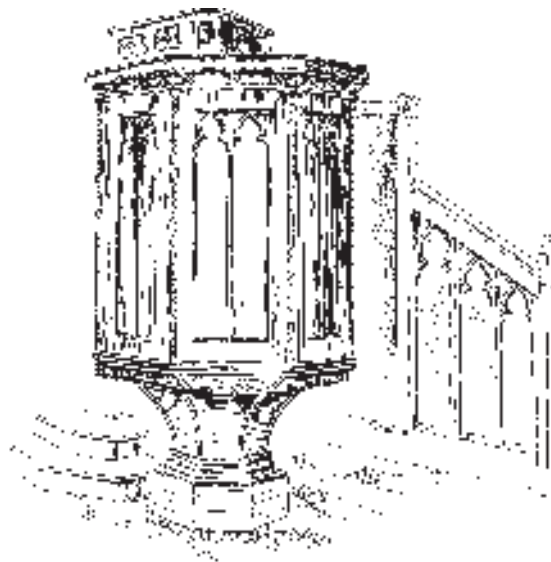


February 8, 2009

Westminster Presbyterian Church



Sermons

Living with Your Biodot
by The Reverend Dr. George H. McConnel

Philippians 4:10-14

I am told that there are two basic rules for handling stress. The first one is: "Don't sweat the small stuff." The second one is: "All things are small." Or perhaps one rule is Dr. Lucy's five-cent advice to Charlie Brown when he comes for help: "Relax." We know that, even without paying our nickel. What we have difficulty doing is getting that idea into practice. As a matter of fact, the stress level for most of us is increasing. We are living with more and more pressure. We are worried about the economy. We are engaging in more activity. The personal demands we place on ourselves, we have not lessened. The lifestyle for most of us is to extend it and extend it and extend it. We are stretched in more directions, and we keep doing because we want to, even though all the time we are saying the opposite—complaining about all the things we have to do, and how little time we have to do them. And that whole package is not going to change unless you change. I certainly cannot change it for you, and neither can anyone else.

The Biodot won't change it either. It might get your attention, and alert you to the stress level you live with. The Biodot is a simple monitor to tell you something about yourself. What you do with the information is up to you. It is your data. Process it as you will. It will tell you when you are stressed—when you are anxious and worried, when you are afraid. How you respond to that information is your business.

I heard over the radio the other day a famous story about Toscanini. A few minutes before a concert one of the two bassoon players in the National Broadcasting Orchestra approached the maestro with sweat standing out on his brow. He complained that something was wrong with his bassoon because he couldn't get a clear tone on Low C or B or B-flat, which are the three bottom notes in the bassoon's range. Toscanini thought about that for a minute, and then he looked up at the musician and he said, "Why are you worrying? Those three notes do not occur in your score tonight!"

In one of Alistair MacLean's books, he tells about a doctor, himself confined forever to a wheelchair with multiple-sclerosis. But his cheerfulness was so contagious that everyone forgot to feel sorry for him, and his own children adored him. Then there came a day when the eldest son was leaving for college. He went into his father's room to say goodbye, and from his bed this was the doctor's advice to his first son, and I quote: "The thing to do is to remember that the biggest troubles you'll ever have to face are those that never come."

Isn't that true? Think about what you were most worried about a year ago. Did it turn out as bad as you had imagined? I know when I go back over my worries I often say to myself, "That never happened." Or, "That wasn't so bad." Or "That really taught me something."

What is under our control, we are comfortable with. It is ours. We can move it around, like chess on a board. Our difficulty comes with those things and those people that we cannot manipulate. That is the main area of stress. It may be a nagging illness, your boss, your kids (which have a way of becoming bosses), the job you are trapped in, the economy, the stock market, or international terrorism. You name it! Through your Biodot take a look at what causes your stress, and chances are it will be in an area you would like to control, but cannot.

A lot of articles and books are being written these days on stress and how to handle it. It seems that the first 75 or 80 percent of any treatment on the subject is devoted to statistics and lengthy discussion of how the body responds when it is under stress—how stress takes a toll on us biologically. All of that may be interesting, but it usually does not do much to equip us to handle it. The reasons for stress are relevant, but when all that is analyzed, the next question is, "What are you going to do about it?"

The Christian answer is, "Give it to God." That's theological language, and it may sound naïve and simplistic. The secular mind would say, "Don't worry about it." The therapist might say, "Just forget about it." Lucy says to Charlie Brown, "Relax." The language of faith is to surrender it to the Lord. Remember the old gospel song, "Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there"? Remember the sermon title, *Do Your Best and Leave God the Rest?*

Psalm 46, which we read together just now, has such a beautiful line to describe it, "Be still and know that I am God." In the midst of nations in uproar and kingdoms tottering; yes, in the midst of worldly turmoil—earth changing and mountains trembling—we are instructed to "Be still and know that I am God."

Apparently that is the right sequence. The "being" still comes before the "knowing God." Part of the symptom of stress is the business and activity that keeps us "moving," rather than "being." The secret to realizing the impact of the Psalm about God being a refuge and a strength, a help in trouble, and a relief from the stress of a troubled situation is to "Be still...and know." Apparently the resources for handling stress are more to be found in our quietness than in our noisy "doing." As the title of the little book puts it: *God is the Still Point of the Turning World.*

So, if it is not something you can change, it belongs to God. Leave it there. So often we attempt to leave it with God; but, we do it like flying a kite. We keep a tight hold on the string. We let it get a ways off and then every once in awhile we yank it back. Deep down, we still want to control it.

The Apostle Paul learned how to do it. From prison, under a sentence of death, he says, "I've learned by now to be quite content whatever my circumstances.... I've found the recipe for being happy whether full or hungry.... Whatever I have, wherever I am, I can make it through anything in the One who makes me who I am."

Isn't that refreshing? Or take Barack Obama—no drama Obama. I believe one of the qualities that makes our new president so attractive is his calm, self-assured manner in all circumstances.

A long time ago a man named Allen Gardiner went out from his native Scotland to be a missionary—the only one in those days who was sent along the southern coast of Argentina. His report back to the mission board in Edinburgh were broken accounts of fruitless labor and hardship: no converts, no successes for having literally given away his life. Then a long time went by and no one heard from him. There was deep concern back in Scotland for his state-of-mind, even for his physical health. And finally, into the silent void, the mission board authorized an expedition of other South American missionaries to go into Gardiner's territory and see if he could be found.

At last, several weeks later, Allen Gardiner was discovered lying dead on the shore of a deserted island, his up-turned boat beside him. And where it had fallen from his hand was his diary telling of the trouble he had been through: hunger, thirst, wounds, and above all, loneliness. But the last sentence, which was scarcely legible before the dying hand could write no more, the last sentence was this, "I am overwhelmed with a sense of the goodness of God." Everything was gone: home, love, human companionship, and now life itself. And yet, on the very edge of the last sentence, Allen Gardiner had it in him to write, "I am overwhelmed with the sense of the goodness of God."

Maybe it is possible, after all, never to be anxious. At any rate, it certainly has a lot to do with the way we utilize the promises and presence of Jesus Christ offered freely to you and to me.