

“Weights & Opposites”

August 18, 2019

@UMCGeneva

Mary Gay McKinney (fillin' in)

Psalm 4

Hebrews 12:1,2

ST. MATTHEW 11:25-30

(This message is part of a summer series employing rock and roll songs for a theme. “Won’t Get Fooled Again” by THE WHO is the song with which the above scripture readings have been paired.)

Before I begin let me direct a question to two people who are not here this morning. Pastor Rich and Pastor Esther. Why did you both take vacation on the same weekend, and leave me to wrestle with the most difficult of these rock songs and pair it with a Psalm that doesn’t lend itself to simple explanations? (smile!) “Won’t Get Fooled Again” might be the most politically incendiary song Pete Townshend wrote for THE WHO, one of the most popular rock bands of all time. Rolling Stone Magazine, in listing the fifty most popular songs by The Who, places it at #1. Other band members said Pete wrote this song about what he really believed. It’s about revolution, political and otherwise. The song is a prophecy of sorts. A revolution looms before us. The revolution happens. When, after the destruction things are pretty much the same, have we been fooled? Pete vows and prays not to be fooled again. None of us wants to be deceived, fooled, and each of us has high hopes that things will change for the better. Some of you may have been in Grant Park the night of President Obama’s election in 2008. High hopes that things would change. Where were you in November of 2016 when President Trump was elected? Again, high hopes again that things will change. All around us we identify signs of an impending something ~ will it be revolution and if so, what kind? While we vow with Pete that we won’t get fooled again, we just might be.

Imagine my surprise in learning that Psalm 4 is a lament, a prayer during a drought for rain. Many had turned to idols, sacrificing to them rather than trusting in God. People were being fooled into trusting something worthless and fleeting. And what a synchronicity that as we pray Psalm 4 it’s raining this morning after some drought. What joy to see the fields beginning to glisten as I drove from DeKalb this morning!

We may need a revolution of some sort and if we do, where does it begin? I suspect, in my heart and yours. If that’s so, what might that mean? What would it look like? Heart

trouble, heart disease usually involves a personal revolution of sorts. A revolution of our hearts, spiritual, emotional would involve change as well.

Our lesson from Hebrews speaks of weights and sins. You've heard throughout your life much about sin, so that's not what I'm addressing this morning. I'd rather ponder weights. What is a weight? Might it be something we can be fooled into thinking we can't do without? A weight might be a sin, but not necessarily. Maybe it could be a bitterness toward another person or a situation, some grievance in our past.

A weight could be a habit that destroys the body. Camel non-filters were the weight that caused my father not to live long enough to see my daughters and son. But then, that was his weight, not mine. It's easy to focus on the weights of others. As Jesus noted of us, it's easier to get focused on a speck in someone else's eye rather than the log in our own.

What weights are weighing me down, and what might be the incentive to let go of them? What weights might be making me uneasy but still have a hold, fooling, deceiving me? F. B. Meyer wrote in the 19th century. He gave us these clues that something could be a weight. We are uneasy about it ~ we've got a hunch that it's not good for us but we don't want to let it go. We argue about it against our conscience. We think things like "I have every right to be angry about that. She did me wrong and I'm not going to forgive her." We know that isn't our way as people of faith so we argue with ourselves and others about it.

Meyer says we go about asking people's advice, whether we may not keep a weight without harm. We find that person who will sympathize with what we are doing or saying or thinking ~ the one who will say "Go ahead. You have every right . . . !"

If we're letting go of weights, what replaces them, in other words, what might be the opposite of a weight? The late Richard Wilbur is acclaimed for his poetry, deep and complex. He was also a husband and father who with his wife and their four children travelled by car before the days of electronic devices to keep kids busy. If you've travelled by car with several others in those days you know how helpful games such as "I love my love" or "Roadside Alphabet" could be. The Wilburs played a game called "Opposites." We know the opposite of night is day, or left might be right, or on might be off, but what of other words like doughnut or actor. Some of the fun in the car ended up in his whimsical little book by that name ~ Opposites. From the book: "What is the opposite of doughnut? A cookie with a hole around it."

The opposite of weight? I'm not sure I can put it to poetry. Let me venture this guess ~ the opposite of weight might be joy or delight. When the weights come off, there's room for joy. When the weights come off could we be delighted, or delightful, or filled with delight?

Ross Gay, a professor of English at Indiana University in Bloomington decided to keep a journal of delight for each day of his 42nd year. It has now become The Book of Delights, which I checked out of our local library. If I had not first heard him speak, I could have judged the book to be another day book out of touch with the harsh realities of peoples' lives, the current state of the world, mine in particular. His coming up was not an easy life or journey. He had me when Krista Tippett asked him how he can have such joy when the world is the way it is. His answer? "How can we not?" We know that joy is something more substantial than happiness or pleasure, but how do we access it? Ross says looking for delight is like developing a muscle. His journal helped him with that.

When I served Clearing UMC near Midway Airport, we partnered with other churches in the area to hold choral extravaganzas on Palm Sunday afternoon and one Sunday evening during Advent. I worked with Father Tom of St. Jane de Chantal in putting together one of those services. When he stopped by our parsonage we sat at the kitchen table and I noticed he was glowing. What could have happened? He shared this: Once a week he said weekday 8:00am mass @ St. Malachy's parish on the west side of Chicago. As he stood behind the altar he looked up and who should be sitting there but Mother Teresa. She came to check on the sisters. You see, St. Malachy's is in a neighborhood so impoverished that she sent nuns from her order to work there. In the sacristy after the service a messenger came to Fr. Tom, "Mother Teresa asks if the young priest would have a few minutes for her." Fr. Tom sat down with her.

"Are you joyous, Father?" Mother Teresa asked.

"Well, I am some of the time. I am new and I have lots of responsibilities and sometimes it gets difficult. I would say. . ."

Fr. Tom said when he finished speaking she paused briefly, looked him in the eye and said this, "God means for you to be filled with JOY."

And I say that, coming from a woman who has seen what she has seen, experienced what she has experienced! That's not just a word for Fr. Tom. It's for us all!

Alas, as much as we'd like to remove our weights, lay those burdens down, in our own strength, or lack thereof, I'm not sure it's possible. But then, Jesus comes along with these

words he spoke so long ago to those carrying weights, burdens and so much more. “Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take MY yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am gentle and lowly of heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” He’s talking here about the weights, the worries, those suspicions that lie deep within us that we aren’t measuring up, that we never will.

One of the treasures we share with the world coming from our Wesleyan tradition is what we know from John Wesley himself. He witnessed to HIS encounter with Jesus. He hadn’t known such was possible. Yes, he followed the teachings of Jesus and the church. He knew the scriptures and most any theological position one might argue in his day. My goodness! He was an Oxford Don, but this encounter with our living Lord was absent from his experience. There on Aldersgate Street he was burdened, weighed down, and somehow that helped him to be more open to Jesus. He says his heart was “strangely warmed.” There’s something delightful about a heart being strangely warmed.

What weighs you down today? What worries, what obligations, what habits, what relationships, what grievances, what resentments? What’s got us fooled? Some, as we practice, we can shove off on our own. Some are stuck and it will take some strange warming, some encounter or re-encounter with Jesus, to make it happen. When we encounter Jesus, delight may just have a chance to be our daily companion, as it is for Ross Gay!

And the weights and sins which cling so closely won’t be able to fool us into thinking we are powerless to send them away and enjoy their opposite. Cling to Jesus, who was never fooled, and we won’t be fooled again!