

Sunday 19th July 2020

I am sure you will all have heard these words or seen them printed on cards or posters. *God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot changecourage to change the things I can.....and the wisdom to know the difference!*

Next to the Lord's Prayer and the Shepherd's Psalm this brief prayer is probably repeated more often than any other religious statement! It most frequently appears anonymous but it has been attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr an outstanding American theologian. **But** whatever its origin many people have found this prayer to be a most effective antidote to worry.

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change and the courage to change the things I can.....

We spend so much time worrying about the things in the past and we regret so many things that cannot be changed....**that** we do **not** have the will or energy left to change the things that **can** be changed.

Omar Khayyam wrote this 'The moving finger writes and having writ moves onnor all thy piety nor wit can lure it back to cancel half a line ...nor all thy tears wash out a word of it!'

How true.....

The acceptance of things that **cannot** be changed is the **first** step towards a more positive way of life.

One of the things that we cannot change and **need to accept** is the past!

How many people are un-equal to the challenge of today because they are living on the regrets of some yesterday?.....

But the **past is dead** and gone and **cannot be changed**.There are many people who do not **want** to 'let go' of the past because it offers them refuge for self-pity!

But in **most** cases we have some responsibility for what has happened!.....

For what we are today is very much the sum total of the choices **we** have made in all **our** yesterdays.

And where on occasions we feel a longing for forgiveness..... we **need** to discover it in God's love and begin again.....

A second thing we need to accept is our humanity **our mere** humanity and its limitations.

In Paul's letter to the Church at Corinth, Chapter 12, which I will leave you to read for yourselves, he wrote that 'thorn in the flesh'...for which the Apostle Paul prayed 3 times that it might be removed. This thorn whatever it wasa physical deformity, or speech impediment was not removed. It was something Paul had to learn to live with. *It was a fact in his life.* Oh yes! God answered the apostle's prayer but **not** in the way he asked!

God's answer was this.... *'My grace is sufficient for youyour weakness is made perfect in my strength!'*

This is the paradoxical nature of our relationship to God.... **only as we become** conscious of our own weakness and limitations can we experience the strength and un-limited resources of our eternal Father. We cannot do it all ourselves!!

One honest Christian looking back over his own experience said, *'God has been as good to me as I have let him be!'*

To know serenity and peace we need to accept the things that we cannot change..... but..... at the same time we need the courage to change the things that we **can** change.

As this prayer suggests there are many occasions when the circumstances of our lives cannot be changed. They are the 'given parts' in the equation of our lives but we can be changed and that can transform the situation!

When we open our lives to God and the resources of his eternal Spirit what courage we can know in the face of the most discouraging circumstances! And as a result what seemed to be a negative factor in our lives is somehow strangely transformed into something positive!

As the Apostle Paul affirms '*All things work together for good to those who love God*'. And someone has appropriately 'put it' like this – '*There are no problems in life – only opportunities*'.

As this prayer implies we avoid changing the things we can change by our pre-occupation with things that cannot be changed.

We spend our time and our energy worrying and struggling with the things of the past. But the second statement of this prayer (*the courage to change the things we can*), gets down to the nitty-gritty of our self.

It does take courage to change one's self!

How many people want a 'new' world but fail to realise it begins with them??

How we need the courage to change the things we can! But we can be such cowards can't we when it comes to wrestling with ourselves..... we keep putting off!

How often we 'put it off' until life slams us up against the hard wall of circumstances until our health.....our job...our family or something equally important to us is threatened with disaster.

We drift along with our life badly out of focus **until we are forced** to do something. Confronted with the chaos to which our twisted and confused thinking has brought uswe realise that we can no longer blame outward circumstances. No! the conflict is within ourselves. And solution that **can** lead to recovery begins with self-honesty.

And what courage we need to travel the road of truth when it concerns one's self. It was Dag Hamerskjld who once wrote...*'The longest journey in the world is the journey inward'*.

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change....courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference.

Wisdom! But, where is such wisdom to be found? What is the source of true wisdom? Solomon in his book of proverbs said, *'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom',.....he knew, King Solomon knew!*

Fear, as it is used here, is what we normally think of as reverence; awe; respect. Out of reverence for God and the things of his Spirit we come to know wisdom; what is right; what is good; we come to know what is true; what is of real worth. Out of **such** a relationship comes humanity's sanity.

Isn't this what the world is crying out for from the depths of its soul?

Listen to the Psalmist, he is talking to us....'In all thy ways acknowledge him and he shall direct thy paths'.

O God grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change.....the courage to accept the things we can and the wisdom to know the difference.

In the words of the Psalmist, 'O God of Jacob, open your ears—I'm praying!

Living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardships as the pathway to peace. Trusting that God will make all things right, we should surrender to His ways so that we can be reasonably happy in this life, knowing the life ahead will be truly wonderful and supremely happy with him forever and ever in the next.

Amen.