

Turning Your Troubles Over to God

How many people here have found themselves with insomnia? I have it sometimes. Maybe you're like me and your mind takes off and goes to different places and people you have encountered. Perhaps you dwell on an embarrassing moment or go to a painful place where something happened in your past. "Gee, I wish I had spelled "squadron" correctly in the seventh-grade spelling bee." Well, you know what? I didn't but look what has happened since. Somehow, I have managed to have a relatively successful career in the classroom, some not so successful but worked through them, worked in management of a major retail chain, earned a bachelor's and master's degrees, have my own home, got married to a great person, and have just completed two years as pastor/teacher at First Congregational and Southwick Congregational Churches.

Every person here has a similar story to tell. You have married, maybe divorced and remarried, raised children, have some grandchildren, your own homes, good jobs, maybe some jobs that weren't so good, graduated with various degrees, and found yourself in a surprising position of, "Hey, this isn't so bad after all." That doesn't mean that it comes without doubts, issues, things that crawl around our brains, issues that cause us to stay awake at night, and a host of other things.

Some people will refer to those things as the "demons" that haunt us. We don't know the nature of the demons that are mentioned in our Gospel lesson this morning. However, we do know they recognized Jesus' authority when he ordered them out. Of course, much like a smart-mouthed fifteen-year-old, the demons thought they should talk back to Jesus. (As a side note, now that I don't have to deal with smart-mouthed fifteen-year-olds anymore, they tend to make

me chuckle.) But, they respect the authority that Jesus has over them and take leave of the man who was possessed.

If the things that trouble us could be called “demons,” do we let them possess us? Do we dwell on those things that we wish that we could have changed in our lives and forget about all the good things that have happened be it because of a decision we made or the hard work we put into something? Have we ever asked in our prayers to be released from these things that bug us or haunt us and keep us from acknowledging the good we have done or the good things that have happened in our lives? It is ok to ask and/or pray for these things. Sometimes it is even in the asking or recognizing that these things can lessen in our lives. Other times, though, we may get hung up on the fact that someone has “authority” over us.

Authority can mean different things to us. It can cause some of us to bristle when we learn that someone or something has “authority” over us, especially as adults who worked so hard to be independent. Maybe we have been people of authority, especially over our children or students for those of us who taught. Perhaps you were the supervisor or the owner of a business. Other times, people don’t have authority over us until we grant it. There are times at home that I am simply NOT the authority in certain matters. Even though I knew it was better to let Mark handle the situation, a small part of me still resented that I did not have the authority over a repair or renovation. How many of us have been in that situation?

As we mature, most of us realize that having authority comes with a great deal of responsibility. Through illness or other incapacity, we or our loved ones have had to turn authority in our lives over to someone else. In the same way that we grow emotionally mature, we also can grow spiritually mature. It is in this spiritual maturation that we can give authority over to God: Father/Mother/Creator, Son/Redeemer/Savior, and/or Holy Spirit/Sanctifier.

“What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” Perhaps it is time for all of us to see if we can give up on this authority and turn it over to God. Let’s not get hung up or tangled in the fact that we are not in charge. We have all heard the saying, “Let go and let God.” We have to rely on the knowledge that God will give us the tools that we need to handle a situation. It is up to us to recognize that sometimes the tools come in the person of a spouse, a family member, or a trusted friend. Sometimes we have to even give that up to a relative stranger.

It is much easier to give that authority to someone who loves us and someone we love. Day after day, week after week, month after month, and year after year God gives us unconditional love. Two weeks from now, we are going to enter into the season of Lent. This year, Ash Wednesday happens to fall on Valentine’s Day. Our theme this year will be “Season of Lent/Season of Love.” We’ll talk more about this as it approaches. In the meantime, I encourage all of us to take some time this week to turn your troubles over to the one who has the authority to take care of them and us.

Let us ask God for the ability to ask, to wait, to listen, and to hear what the one who speaks with authority has for us. What gifts have been bestowed on us to deal with our troubles and issues? What gifts have been given to others who can be of assistance? Let us recognize our own spiritual maturity to recognize this authority as love. Amen.