

"Let It Be"
Matthew 6:25-34
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October 13, 2019

Just do it! Make it happen! Take control! Be a mover and shaker! Bend history! Shape the future! Don't just sit there, do something! These sentences illustrate the predominant mindset of the Western world: active, aggressive. The Eastern mindset is different. It is one of relinquishment and passivity. Don't just do something; sit there. Don't push the river; it flows by itself.

You may also have noticed a difference in North-South mentalities. At one point in my life I organized two mission trips to Mexico. We dealt with Mazahua Indians with a *manana* attitude toward life. I've mellowed a good deal since Donna got hold of me, but in those days I was hard-wired for action, which impressed them not at all. They took their time, let things be, moved with unhurried ease through each day, week, **month**, **YEAR!!** I found this maddening! I fretted, stormed, nagged, and

threatened. They smiled, apologized, and returned to their rhythm. Nothing changed, except for the elevation of my blood pressure.

My parents had several stock phrases related to over-functioning. "Let well enough alone." "Let sleeping dogs lie." "Don't borrow trouble." My tendency, though, was to get steamed up about things that I ought to leave alone. I got this little story from a brother-in-law. A man approached an Eastern holy man. "O great guru," he cried, "what is wisdom?" The old man handed the seeker a bottle and a duck. "When you can get the duck into the bottle, you will know wisdom. Three days later the man returned without the bottle or the duck. "Where are the bottle and the duck?" asked the guru. Replied the man: "Not my bottle, not my duck, not my problem." Not bad!

There is a time when one more turn of the screw strips the threads, one more brush stroke spoils the painting, one more word spoils the sentence, one more flower overloads the arrangement, one more line spoils the design. There is a time to do and a time to let be, and

wisdom lies in knowing which time it is.

When you get to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on! There is another option. You remember the tired, old story about the man who fell while mountain climbing. He was still clinging to the end of his rope, praying for all he was worth. "Lord, save me!" A voice answered, "This is the Lord." "Is it really you, Lord?" "Yes. Do you trust me?" "With all my heart!" "Then let go of the rope!" Knowing when to hang on and when to let go belongs to the fine art of discernment. How we practice discernment can mean the difference between life and death. Not every voice that claims to be the Lord's is, in fact, the Lord's voice.

Jesus said of himself, "No one takes my life from me; I lay it down of my own accord." Resignation is not the same as despair. Clinging to life may be an act of trust and hope, or it may be the fearful clutching at straws by a drowning person. Even in the throes of death, as we are parted from loved ones, we affirm that God's hands hold our deaths as they have held our lives and that, living or dying, we are

in the hands of the Eternal.

Once upon a time a girl-child was visited by a strange angel, who told her she would have a baby fathered by God himself. Her response was a classic: *Behold, I am the handmaiden of the Lord; let it be unto me according to thy word.* Let it be! Her name was Mary, of course, and we are still learning from her. In 1970 John Lennon and Paul McCartney, two of the Beatles, published a song. Do you know what they called it? *Let it be.* Guess who it's about!

*When I find myself in times of trouble
Mother Mary comes to me
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be
And in my hour of darkness
She is standing right in front of me
Speaking words of wisdom let it be.
Let it be, let it be, let it be, let it be,
Whisper words of wisdom, let it be*

Jesus reveals himself as Mary's true son in his famed Sermon on the Mount, in that passage of it related to our need to trust in God's providential care of us. You remember that he

speaks of how God clothes the lilies of the field, that neither sow nor spin, and how God feeds the birds of the air, even though they neither sow, reap, nor store grain. Jesus says that by contrast we work and worry a lot, and much of it is merely nervous-making activity. He correctly diagnoses our condition as one of anxiety, and he suggests that we burn a good deal of energy in fruitless worry about scarcity—about not having enough, of getting caught short. Jesus also pegs this as a lack of faith in God, who does and will feed and clothe us.

Instead of vain attempts to lay up for tomorrow enough to make tomorrow secure, we are to remember that tomorrow belongs to God. No Individual Retirement Account or lottery winning or stock portfolio or Social Security plan or anticipated inheritance can guarantee tomorrow. No amount of worry can add an hour to our lifespan, although worry can shorten our lives! There is, in God's economy, a time to let be, to let go, and to let God. Jesus invites us to embrace a belief in abundance rather than scarcity, and a trust in divine

providence rather than in human capacity.

This does not mean that we all quit our jobs tomorrow and go on the dole. It does not mean that we slack off, get lazy, careless or sloppy. It does not mean that we stop caring about the basics of life. What Jesus means is that, if we are up in the air, circling about, our attitude toward life—the angle from which we make our approach—indicates what kind of landing we will make. We trust the wings of the Almighty to bear us up until we shall be set down at a place on earth where abundant life is possible.

We are going to be provided with the basics, so our focus is to be on God's kingdom (reign) and God's righteousness (justice). We have been trained to believe that food, clothing, and shelter are the basics. Jesus reverses this. The basics where God reigns have to do with justice, a concern that the entire human household has enough. The focus is on the community, not the individual. Jesus is saying, if you take care of the community, you will be taken care of in return.

Jesus has a few choice words, too, about living mentally in the future, worrying about tomorrow. He says don't do it! *Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.* These words are so true, but so difficult to live by. The person who is able to "stay in the moment" is the only one who is really "here." Those of us who are perpetually wool gathering, go on little mental excursions, are not fully in touch with the earth. In one sense it might be said of us that the lights are on, but nobody's home.

When you're with somebody who's "all here," you have the sense that you have her full attention, that you and the subject you are talking about are presently her most important agenda. Such a person validates and honors you by paying close attention to you. In the presence of such attentiveness, anxiety is quieted.

On December 8, 1980 John Lennon was shot dead outside his Manhattan apartment. On April 17, 1998 Paul McCartney lost his beloved

wife, Linda, to breast cancer. They had no way of knowing the personal implications of these lyrics when they wrote them, but the words of Lennon and McCartney's song still stand.

*And when the brokenhearted people
Living in the world agree,
There will be an answer, let it be.
For though they may be parted
There is still a chance that they will see,
There will be an answer, let it be.
Let it be, let it be, let it be, let it be, yeah
There will be an answer, let it be.
Let it be, let it be, let it be, let it be,
Whisper words of wisdom, let it be.*

I know a young man whose world has turned dark. He wants desperately to marry, settle down, and father children. He watches with mounting anxiety and envy as one friend after another becomes engaged, then married. He is by this time a veteran groomsman. He could teach a short course on wedding etiquette. Twice in three years he has been left by women he thought would marry him. He does not yet see a pattern in their behavior or his.

His lack of self-esteem drives him to seek the esteem of others; and his lack makes it impossible for him ever to receive enough validation. His need is insatiable, because he is seeking from others what is missing in himself. His anxiety pushes him to intensify attempts at intimacy, which tends in turn to frighten away the very persons he wishes to attract. It's a vicious circle. He beats himself up emotionally, expressing feelings of failure and worthlessness. At the same time, he is in denial that this relationship has failed.

He is loath to give up on the relationship. He calls, emails, and drops by his former girlfriend's apartment. She won't let him in the door. He enlists mutual friends to prevail upon her to give their relationship another try. She refuses. His lack of insight into what motivates his behavior guarantees the repetition of the same behavior. What should he do? The trouble is that he's already doing too much. He should do less, maybe for a while do nothing—just let it be—and then when he has a little emotional distance from the relationship, he might profitably reflect upon his life.

Then there is the young woman who must always be on the go. Her parents are into astrology. When this daughter was born, they had an astrological chart done on her. They saw it was already written in the stars that the girl would be a social butterfly. She is flighty and fun, a high energy person, who is social secretary for every group she's ever been part of. She dislikes solitude, avoids it whenever and wherever she can, fills every waking moment with activity and people. Her life is awirl in a social swirl. She is wound tighter than an eight-day clock.

There is never enough time in the day, so she over-schedules and multi-tasks. At work she types while she telephones. In the car she puts on her makeup and fiddles with the radio dial while she drives. At home she irons while she eats. She is a regular whirling dervish. She despises silence, so even when she is alone she has a conversation going in her head. Instead of allowing life to unfold, she has taken it as her personal responsibility to make things happen. What she wants, unconsciously, is wisdom. What she needs, without knowing it, is for the

light to shine. And she'll get neither until she is able to let things be. She could do worse that to spend a little time with John Lennon and Paul McCartney, revisiting the last of the lyrics of a song she knows well.

*And when the night is cloudy
There is still a light that shines on me,
Shine until tomorrow, let it be.
I wake up to the sound of music
Mother Mary comes to me,
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be.
Let it be, let it be, let it be, let it be,
There will be answer, let it be.
Let it be, let it be, let it be, let it be,
Whisper words of wisdom, let it be.*

Life is life, no more, no less. It is a gift given by our Creator without guarantees. Just consider:

- Although they may prolong and enhance your life, no diet or exercise regimen can prevent your eventual death.
- No miracle drug can guarantee your longevity.
- No doctor or hospital can guarantee your

health.

- No person can guarantee your happiness.
- No level of activity can galvanize you against loneliness.
- No amount of worry can make your future secure.

The word of Jesus is that your future, in God's hands, is already secure. Let it be. We have a word for this in the Church. It is *Amen!* Let it be.

Let the prayer of St. Louis-born theologian Reinhold Niebuhr be our prayer:
God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.

And the congregation said with one voice:
Amen!