

So we do not lose heart

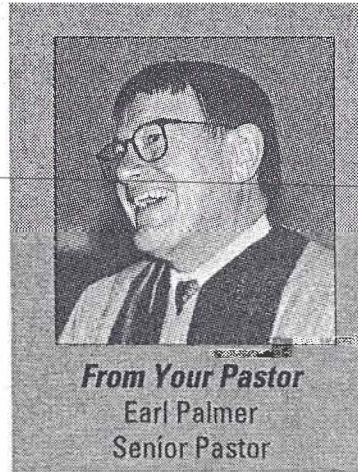
The short sentence above comes from St. Paul and it is written to his friends in Corinth at a very hard time in Paul's life. We all know stories of people who lose their confidence and their hope, but St. Paul is telling of gaining heart at his own time of peril. What has happened in him to cause "heart growth?" I think part of Paul's secret is found in one of his famous lists. This is how he puts it in this last letter to a church written for his imprisonment in Rome.

"Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

"I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me;

indeed, you were concerned for me, but you had no opportunity to show it. Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and going hungry, of having plenty or living in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me."
— Philipians 4: 8-13 (NRSV)

Paul keeps his stride by focusing on the great facts of the faithfulness and goodness of God. Paul's point is that we are able to decide what we are going to think about



even if we cannot control what happens to us.

Paul keeps his equilibrium and his stride – "I can take in stride all things because of Christ" – by remembering what he has learned en route about the character of Christ and by deciding to focus on that grand truth for his own life journey.

Paul has given us a profound and very straightforward strategy for keeping our heads clear. He has also advocated by his own example the biblical model for meditation.

Meditation in the Old and New Testament is not a ceremonially complicated ritual of mind clearing, but the very simple

decision to remember the great truths about God's amazing grace toward us and his faithfulness to keep his promises. This is the focusing tradition of meditation that is open to amateurs and is not a religious art form reserved for spiritual experts.

Every time I decide to focus my mind on the grand positives of God's law and good news promises, I am steering my whole self toward the place where I am enabled to catch my breath, tell the Lord my sorrows, find solid footing and even discover the new perspective that comes from the gospel of Jesus Christ about my particular life situation.

The best thing about Paul's list is that the Lord of the stride is already there on the road with us. His love and faithfulness are not religious themes to be mastered, but real events. The Son of Man from Nazareth loves us as the living Redeemer and walks with us now.

Your Pastor, Earl F. Palmer