

A healthy will for the future

I've been thinking about the German Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer and rereading his books and letters because of the class I'm teaching this spring on his life journey and his great convictions about the meaning of life. There is one short paragraph that he wrote in 1943 that I believe is especially challenging to our generation in this time.

In it, Bonhoeffer takes on the cynical pessimism that has trapped so many of the people he knows. He writes "It is true that there is a silly, cowardly kind of optimism, which we must condemn. But the optimism that is will for the future should never be despised, even if it is proved wrong a hundred times; it is health and vitality, and the sick man has no business to impugn it."

I am especially intrigued by the phrase he uses to describe the optimism he advocates: It is that healthy "will for the future." No one should ever despise a healthy will for the future. In fact he concludes this paragraph with an unforgettable sentence. "It may be that the day of judgment will dawn tomorrow; in that case, we shall gladly stop working for a better future. But not before."



From Your Minister

Earl F. Palmer

Therefore, beginning with our own repentance and discovery of grace, we start investing our lives in making a difference in the world. We try to invest ourselves in people's lives in ways that encourage. That difference-making usually takes place in small-scale ways, person-to-person, but each separate investment in the healthy optimism becomes in total

Bonhoeffer is right. This young pastor, even in his fatal imprisonment, has been grasped by the gospel of Jesus Christ. When we experience the love of Christ, the very first change is this healthy will for the future. We know the powerful love of Christ; we know that Jesus the Lord can forgive human sins and resolve even the most complicated human crises.

a model of hope. That is how cultures and civilizations are changed for the better.

The more I live, one thing has become very clear to me: the people who major in telling how bad everything and everyone is are not the people who make a difference for hope, though they may intensify our awareness of the crises. The ones who change the world for good have a healthy will for the future. They have found some particular, concrete and personal way to invest in people for that future because of love.

What a time to be alive! We have the chance right in front of us to create real differences. When they are added together they make all of the survivalists with their hoards of gold and secret collections of assault weapons look foolish because they wagered on despair, not knowing that we live on this side of Good Friday and Easter. They joined up with the illness not with the health.

Bonhoeffer wrote another sentence in a letter from prison and that sentence puts it best of all. He wrote, "I want to live every day as if it were my last and every day as if there were a great future."