

For those watching my blog, or reading the words for meditation in recent bulletins, you'll notice that I've been re-reading Eckhart Tolle's book *The Power of Now*. Eckhart Tolle was born in Germany, studied in London and became a research scholar at Cambridge University. At the age of 29, he underwent a profound personal and spiritual transformation that literally changed his identity...not unlike what happened to Saul of Tarsis who became the apostle Paul, whose letter we are reading this summer.

Tolle is not a disciple of any particular religion; he has found a way to synthesize the various religious teachings to help people find a way out of suffering into a place of peace. Living in Vancouver since 1996, Tolle's writing and approach to life reminds me of the teachings of the great masters – Buddha, Jesus, Confucius, Mohammed. His book *The Power of Now* is almost like a "how to" manual to manifest in our lives, Paul's writing that Marion read for us today.

How many heard me use the word suffering a few seconds ago. I said Tolle has found a way to help people to find a way out of suffering to a place of peace. How many got hooked on the word suffering? How many said to themselves inadvertently, this sermon's not for me, I'm not suffering? We think of what happened to our family members in their battles with disease, or the anguish families will feel over the death of nearly 100 people in Norway at the hands of a Christian, or the helplessness of seeing watching our loved ones eaten up by any number of addictions, or even seeing Jesus on the cross. Now that's suffering, we'll say. And that's true. When we compare our petty difficulties or our favourite hang-ups to these problems we say we don't suffer at all.

That's part of the problem with the word suffering. But friends, whenever we carry a story about something that happened to us, or reflect on the terrible thing our friend said to us, or dwell on the interpretation we have of someone's body movements, we feel pinched, we feel uncomfortable, we might even feel anger. We might not be hanging on a cross, but this is what Tolle thinks of as suffering, as much as the depth of human pain people experience.

Suffering also includes our personal list of transgressions we like to hang onto about ourselves. The things in our lives for which we carry residual guilt, shame, bitterness, disappointment. Each of us has a list like this. I know I do. And when we remember what it was that we did, it floods back to us like we had done it yesterday. I remember once as an enthusiastic, energetic fundraising specialist with Theatre Calgary I went looking for money from Nova Corporation – this was in the late 80's and Nova was one of the mega energy companies in Calgary.

The director of public affairs was responsible for getting me my job at Theatre Calgary, she was on the board of Directors of the Theatre. I was paying a visit to her assistant, seeking sponsorship dollars for next season, when the director stuck her nose in to ask a question of her assistant. Now this director stood about 4'11 in four inch heels. She was petit and feisty. She was a powerful woman in Calgary and made things happen. Because I felt a degree of comfort with her, and assumed a level of intimacy with her that was just not there, I greeted her with "Hi there cutie." Can you believe it? I actually said that. She looked at me, said nothing, and turned on her four inch heels.

I sought her out and apologized. I wrote her a letter weeks later apologizing. Eventually, I became the minister of music at Summerland United Church. She happened to be visiting family in the area one Christmas and showed up in worship on Christmas Eve. She didn't know I had moved to Summerland, I didn't she had family in the area. I greeted her, pleasantly, much more appropriately, but all I could think of was how completely inappropriate I had been that day in her assistant's office. Well I sent yet another letter of apology two weeks later, letting her know how my life had changed and how that incident taught me a lot.

Doesn't matter what I did to try to let go of that experience, the minute I saw, the energy of my original embarrassment flooded back. Even as I tell the story I feel embarrassed and silly. And that's just one incident on my list of things I'd rather forget. Anyone else have a list? Some of the events are relatively harmless, some are absolutely despicable.

Tolle writes that the mind has the incredible capacity to keep us locked in pain and suffering with the turn of a thought. We think so much that we have lost the ability to seek wisdom from other sources of consciousness. Tolle would say it's a worldwide epidemic. Our minds continually take us to a story remembered or a future imagined that our effectiveness is reduced and we live in a perpetual state of pain or suffering, disease or discomfort. It becomes an addiction upon which our bodies eventually thrive.

My hunch is that the apostle Paul will have had this very same experience every time he thought about how he allowed the killing of the first Christian martyr – Stephen. Think of the contradictions in his own mind as he remembered his life story and wrote the words "if God is for us, who can be against us?" Or "We do not know how to pray as we ought, so the Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words." Paul is expressing his own internal tension between his actions and his hoped for theology...all of which is in the mind. The mind is in conflict with itself.

Eckhart Tolle writes that God is not a thing to be named, but an experience, or an awareness of simply being. In fact, God is nothing but being. And as such, God can not be experienced in the here and right now. An idea about God can exist in the past and future, but an experience of God, can only occur right here, and right now. And listen to what he writes about love. "Love, joy and peace are deep states of Being, or rather three aspects of the state of inner connectedness...as such they have no opposite." Did you hear that – his thesis is that there is no opposite to pure love, pure joy, pure peace. That's because according to Tolle "(peace, love and joy) arise from beyond the mind." They are deep states of being. Real love doesn't make you suffer. It doesn't suddenly turn into hate, nor does real joy turn into hate.

So let's now return to Paul's writing and that remarkably hopeful line. "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." I do believe Paul is right in his idea about the love of God. For certain. And his mind is still remembering the last cry before Stephen died. I wonder if Paul knew something of God's love experientially.

If love then is a state of being, or an aspect of all Being and therefore God, it must be experienced in the right here and right now. It will not be found in any story remembered or in any future imagined – that's what Paul means when he gives us that list of earthly things. The incredible state of being in love, experienced in and witnessed to by the one we call Christ, will only be found in this moment as we experience it. This is the power of Now. All grace, all healing, all life will be found in letting our minds cease their relentless addiction to suffering, and allowing our bodies and other states of consciousness focus on right now.

That is why I keep saying at Waves, in study groups, in board and committee meetings. Religious belief is interesting. What we choose to believe about a particular story is interesting, but it doesn't end suffering. Belief keeps the mind active, pursuing a story remembered or a future imagined. Practice, practicing the presence of moment of now changes how we experience the world, it changes how we experience ourselves, it changes how we experience the people we like to be angry with. May this be our work as we move into the turbulent waters of rebuilding, reenergizing, reconstructing our faith community. Amen.

As I mentioned, Tolle's book is a virtual how to in experience the love of God known in Christ Jesus and I have just scratched the surface as I've tried to help us think through why we get ourselves into trouble without even trying. And there are lots of ways to practice the being present in the moment....but for this morning I'd like you to try this

as a way of experience the power of now, the power of God's presence, God's love in your life right now.

Each of us is sitting here with thoughts going on in heads. "That was a bunch of whoo haaa. When will he please stop...please? What will I make for lunch? I liked it but I don't think I get it."

Some of you will be focussing on your list of things you'd like to forget. Some of you are still caring old data about an old event about which you have untold projections and assumptions. You're making up your own stories even as you sit here.

I don't know if this is all true...I can imagine some of it might be true. Our minds are on overdrive...and we are suffering.

One way to experience the love of God in the Power of Now is to simply do this. Take long deep breaths and let the only thing you hear be my voice.

Look at your hands. But wait before you lift them up to look at them....feel every muscle and tendon and joint as you move your arms and hands up to in front of your face. Try it. Move your hands up to about 18 inches in front of your face. Slowly...and feel every part of the movement, watch your hands come up and hold them there as you are able. Try it again...only feel what it feels like to put your hands at your side.

Now lift them again....feeling everything. Now continue to breathe and look closely at your hands. Look at the skin texture....look at the creases where your fingers and your hands fold. Look at your wrists and how they may be knotted or smooth. Notice the small blue veins just under the surface of the skin. Look at your finger nails.

Look at these things friends...not in judgment, but in curiosity. Simply look at them.

Set them down as you need to. While you were looking at your hands, what happened to your mind? What happened to you thinking? What's happening in your body right now? An alternative consciousness – the looking – allowed your mind to be at rest and you were able to experience a moment of now...and did you feel at peace.

This is a glimpse into the power of now, the love of God known and exemplified in Christ Jesus. The call to a discipline gets set before us, doesn't it. How do you want to handle your next moment. The choice yours.

That was our prayer of thanksgiving, may we live into this peace.

Amen