

EAGERNESS – ENERGY OF THE HEART

Javed Akhtar, a poet, lyricist and scriptwriter from India, wrote the following

If you have eagerness in your heart, it means you are alive,

If your eyes are filled with dreams, it means you are alive

Learn to be free like the wind,

Learn to flow freely like the river,

Embrace every moment with open arms,

See a new horizon every time with your eyes,

If you carry surprise in your eyes, it means you are alive,

If you have eagerness in your heart, it means you are alive.

If you have eagerness in your heart, it means you are alive: what a perfect statement for the value of the month - eagerness. I put these questions to you:

Do you have eagerness in your heart regarding St. David's? Are your eyes filled with dreams for this community of faith? Are you alive in this place, embracing every moment with open arms, willing to see its new horizons and possibilities?

It is always a learning experience for me when I research the values that we uphold during the year and reflect on them with you. As I mulled over the "eagerness" value, I thought about my approach to life and how I tend to lean toward a rather serious, common-sense approach to life mixed with an unhealthy dose of anxiety and frustration.

My approach to life is partly influenced by living in a world in which we, as individuals and as communities, countries, and religions, so often treat each other with little respect, care, and acceptance and partly influenced by my negative and judgmental attitudes toward myself. Of late, I have been feeling discouraged by our continued struggles at St. David's, and I know many of you feel the same.

I have always been your greatest cheerleader because I believe that there is such great potential for St. David's to be a thriving community of faith. But I am not convinced that you believe it enough in your hearts. So, I am thankful for this opportunity to reflect on the value of eagerness and to invite all of us to embrace eagerness as the energy that rejuvenates us this year.

Being eager can be defined as being excited and impatient to do something, to see something happen, to be part of something. Recently my oldest sister sent me a picture of her grandchild Brenna who was on her way to start a new school year. I could see the eagerness shining in her eyes and her impatience as she waited for her dad to take her to school. As we stand on the threshold of a new church season, I suggest that such eagerness must be the energy at the heart of this community. Imagine the possibilities if it were. I believe we all need some eagerness to stir our hope and anticipation for the future and be like a student looking forward to a new school year.

Eagerness has two parts to it: the first is to be excited, to anticipate, and to be willing. The second part is, perhaps, the essential aspect. It is being prepared to do something intentionally. It is about wanting to be a part of something and then intentionally working toward making things happen.

In our individual lives, we do not often embrace the present moment, as we wait for something better to happen: for a dream to be realized, for an illness to end, for the pain to disappear, for a relationship to heal, for a problem to be solved. But eagerness is about waiting for something to happen but also about intentionally participating to ensure the best possible outcome no matter what we may be facing.

If we just wait around for something to happen or expect someone else to do the work, we contribute little to bringing about a positive outcome. Expecting the worst or the best has to do with attitude. A negative or cynical attitude is enough to prevent us from giving our best effort and attention to our goals, which may lead to no result at all. An attitude of eagerness feeds the determination and persistence required for action. If we expect an unfavorable outcome, we will have little incentive to work toward a favorable outcome. Eagerness encourages us to expect the best possible outcome and to take responsibility for making it happen.

This morning we heard brief excerpts from the beginning and the end of the epic ancient Hebrew story of the Exodus. In the first reading, we may detect Moses' frustration as he attempted to get the Israelites energized to take ownership of their freedom. He tells God that they are not listening to

him. Throughout the story, Moses and God do all the work to bring about the best possible outcome, freedom for the Israelites, but the people remain only passive observers of all the plagues and the conflict and contribute little to the outcome.

It seems to me that the Israelites chose to expect an unfavorable outcome, so they had little incentive to work toward their freedom. Then something changed. They began to see, as a result of the plagues, that the Pharaoh, was not as all-powerful as they had thought. They realized that he did not have ultimate authority over their lives. God did, and they did. Perhaps this revelation inspired them so when they were told to mark their doorways indicating that they God's people, they eagerly set to work as they began to anticipate a positive outcome – freedom

From the second excerpt, we heard the directive of Pharaoh for Moses to take his people and leave Egypt. Listening to the inner urgings of God and following the Spirit who led them forward, the Israelites took on a new level of responsibility for their own lives and gained their freedom. To a large extent, they were prisoners of their limited understanding and their passive pessimism that hindered their ability to believe in a better outcome. The Israelites created a new paradigm for themselves, a renewed way of being.

As a church, we too can create a new paradigm for ourselves. We can be discouraged by our budget or by declining membership, or we can eagerly take responsibility for a positive outcome and success.

In the gospel of Luke, we hear how Jesus was eager to share the Passover with his friends. I have a picture in my mind of Jesus as someone who tended toward eagerness. He was not only keen to share meals and life with people, but he made those relationships happen. He invited himself to the home of Nicodemus; he interacted with people, even if they did not want to do so with him. Jesus appears to be excited about people having hope and experiencing new life. He wanted a positive outcome for people; for them to believe that they were loved and appreciated as well as to take responsibility for their faith and actions.

These biblical examples suggest that eagerness is a powerful way to energize and take responsibility for our faith, our church life, our relationships, and our behavior. I am eager to work with people who are excited for and engaged in behaviors and activities that promote compassion, respect, acceptance, and love and who take responsibility for their faith.

Recently I read a study by Bart van den Hooff and Linda Hendrix, at the Amsterdam School of Communications Research at the University of Amsterdam. They looked at the difference between the attitudes of willingness and eagerness in sharing information. What struck me was the distinction between willingness and eagerness: willing individuals tend to collect more knowledge than they share while eager people collect and share in equal degrees. Applying this theory to church is to say that some people in the church are quite willing to share ideas and thoughts about how to raise money or how to run the church and many good ideas often come via information sharing. Unfortunately, too often these ideas are never acted upon.

Eager people tend to share their knowledge and personal insights, but they also work toward achieving the goals established from that information. Eagerness is the energy of excitement as well as action. It can motivate and inspire us; it can help us to produce positive results that lead to increased determination to achieve and become a thriving church. When we expect a good outcome, we will be filled with anticipation and dive eagerly into a project. Just being excited about a good result will not create that result. We cannot just be willing to succeed, but together we must act to succeed.

Sujantra McKeever is a spiritual teacher and the founder of Pilgrimage of the Heart Yoga in San Diego. Although he writes more for the individual, I share a quote by him replacing the individual with the church. He writes, "Churches all have hopes and dreams. Through the power of mind and thought we can project ourselves forward and visualize our future and our goals: the things in life we wish to experience, become, and achieve."

To succeed takes energy and intensity. Church life can be very stagnant and lethargic so we must apply our sincere effort if we wish to mold

and shape our congregational life. Eagerness is intense enthusiasm and if we use this energy, we can accomplish anything.

It is my promise to maintain an attitude of hopefulness and excitement. I invite all of us to let eagerness be the energy of our hearts. We have a Harvest Tea coming up, let's work to make it a success. We must re-visualize our church school, let's work to make it a success.

In conclusion I read again the quote by Rabbi Shalomi read earlier: "But there is something that emerges when a certain group's energy of eagerness begins to flow together. There is a current among us happening. That current allows you to see the oneness, the identity with all that we have – then you say.... there is in this connection not what I am doing to you or you are doing to me, but an experience that is totally interactive." Let our motto be: "if we have eagerness in our hearts, we are alive." Amen.