

St. Mary's Sermons

John 10:10

New Living Translation (NLT)

I want to start this evening by asking you a question: “How do you maintain your wellbeing”?
“Any suggestions”?

The reason why I asked you that question is, that just before Christmas I was privileged to be involved in the process of appointing a new headteacher for the Underwood church of England school, and one of the questions we asked the candidates during their interview was about wellbeing. Despite two of the three candidates being practicing Christians no one mentioned their faith in their answer. This shocked and saddened me as I would say that my faith is absolutely key to my sense of wellbeing.

A couple of the candidates did mention getting out into the countryside as being important to them. As Christians, I am sure we don't find that in the least bit surprising! Recently, I saw part of a programme featuring the 100 best walks in Great Britain. As they were describing why they enjoyed being where they were, several people said, that although they did not consider themselves to be religious, there was something spiritual about being in beautiful surroundings. Getting out into the countryside to enjoy some fresh air and some peace and quiet is something that I always find, not only makes me feel better, but also closer to God. That may, in part, be because we are away from many of the things that can distract us. I'm sure that many of you would also echo that sentiment.

The bible tells us that the heavens declare the glory of God. When we see beauty and the vastness of world in which we live then we can't help but be lost in wonder and declare the goodness of God. The well-known and popular hymn puts it so well: *“When through the woods and forest glade I wander and hear birds sing sweetly in the trees. When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur and hear the brook and fell the gentle breeze then sings my soul my savour God to thee, how great thou art.”*

As a result of that interview process, I've been thinking a great deal about why two strong Christians did not seem to make the connection between their faith and their wellbeing. Is it just that we consider wellbeing to be a secular agenda that we can't relate to? If that is the

case, then the church has missed a trick by only being prepared to talk about spirituality which is a subject that many people today are not interested in or can't relate to, whereas currently, there is a huge interest in wellbeing. Throughout the course of the pandemic, we have heard so much about the impact that lockdown has had on our mental health and how mental health services are overwhelmed.

Of course, wellbeing can mean many different things and most commonly we talk about physical wellbeing, so we talk about getting more exercise, eating more healthily etc.

For me wellbeing is all about being whole people. As Christians, I'm sure we would all say that we are made up of three parts: body, mind and spirit, and it seems obvious to me that, if we neglect one area of our lives then it is impossible to become a well-rounded person. I believe that there is a very close connection between mind and spirit. Yet sadly, in our society today, many have neglected to focus on the spiritual dimension to their lives which is significantly contributing to the huge mental health crisis that we are currently experiencing.

Last weekend, Mark Selby the world number 1 snooker player apologised to his fans after being defeated 6-1 in the quarter finals of the masters saying, "I'm not in a good place at the moment!". Mark has been suffering with depression due to his dad dying when he was only 15 and not getting to see him play. Here is someone, who in the eyes of many, has got everything, fame, fortune, and a good family, and yet, he clearly has a problem. That's just one high profile example of how, as a society, we have neglected the spiritual dimension of our lives and we are paying a huge price. As Christians we have a tremendous opportunity to engage with people and show them the important part that faith in Jesus can play in their wellbeing.

So, this evening, I want to think about how faith can help with our own sense of wellbeing? Clearly, this is a huge subject that I cannot possibly do justice to in the few minutes that I have left, but let me give you a few thoughts:

- 1. faith gives us a clear sense of identity**

In our reading this morning Jesus said that he had come that we might have life and life in all its fullness. It is only through a relationship with Jesus we can truly experience the fullness of life.

Knowing who we are, that we are special and that we are loved simply for who we are, is so important. As I'm sure you will remember that, as Jesus came out of the river Jordan, having been baptised by John, the spirit descended upon him and there was a voice from heaven that said, *this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased*. What makes this encounter so remarkable is that Jesus had done absolutely nothing to deserve the favour of his Father. He had not preached a single sermon or performed a single miracle. If even Jesus needed the affirmation of his father how much more do we need that same affirmation?

2 Faith gives me direction for life and hope for the future.

Knowing that we are not here by chance, but that God has a purpose and a plan for our lives makes such a difference.

Knowing that this world is not all we have to live for, and that God is preparing for us a much better life beyond the grave where there will be no more pain, no more suffering, no more death, helps us to put our lives in this world into a proper perspective.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:19 *"...and if our hope in Christ is for this life only, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world. **BUT** Christ has indeed been raised from the dead. He has once and for all broken the stranglehold of death over us."*

3. Faith gives me strength when the going gets tough.

Life has not been easy for any of us recently, but knowing that you are not on your own, that the holy spirit is always such a blessing. Knowing, as Bill Johnson says, *God is in charge, not in control or that would make him responsible for all the evil in the world*, helps us make sense of the chaos of the world in which we now live.

Jesus said, *“Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”* Everyone that I talk to at the moment expresses a weariness with the current pandemic. We are fed up with the ever-changing rules and regulations and with all the restrictions that have been place on our lives. Jesus’ invitation to come to him is still open to everyone. If you are weighed down by the problems of life, addiction, unemployment, and family tensions, give them to God and ask for his help, and you will experience his power to transform you.

In his letter to the Philippians Paul writes: *Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank him for all he has done.⁷ Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.*

Knowing that we can bring all our concerns to God in prayer really should make such a difference to the way we cope with the problems that life throws in our direction. I could quote another well-known hymn – *“What a friend we have in Jesus”*.

I hope that you have not only found this sermon to be a useful personal reminder, but also a challenge about how you might talk with others about their wellbeing. It follows, from what I have said, that our priority should be to ensure that we maintain a healthy wellbeing by developing good spiritual disciplines of prayer, worship, and study of God’s word - the bible – and, of course, receiving the spiritual food of the Holy Communion.

So, I want to encourage you to ask yourself the question, *what am I doing to ensure that my relationship with God remains key to the way that I live my life? How am I maintaining a healthy spiritual wellbeing and ensuring that my faith continues to grow?*

If you want to explore more about the topic of wellbeing, I recommend Dave Smith book: ***God’s plan for your wellbeing.***