

Lent 1B - 2021

It Might Have Been

In the 1800s, poet John Greenleaf Whittier wrote one of his most quoted poems in the English language. The poem was titled, "Maud Muller." You've never heard of it? Actually, not many people remember this sorrowful poem, but generations of people have quoted two famous lines from its final stanza. "Maud Muller" is about a young maiden who, while working the fields one day, sees a handsome young Judge riding by on horseback. She offers him a drink of cool water. Their encounter lasts only a few moments, but it makes a deep impression on both of them.

Maud is greatly attracted to the Judge, and she dreams of marrying someone of his gentleness and integrity. She could leave the fields behind and live as the wife of a wealthy and powerful man.

At the same time, the Judge is attracted to Maud. He is tired of his career, and he dreams of marrying a warm, compassionate woman like Maud and settling into a simpler life in the country.

But neither Maud nor the Judge acknowledges their attraction to one another. They are from different social classes---they cannot risk breaking the bonds of social conformity.

Maud later marries a man who brings her much pain and hardship. The Judge also enters into a loveless marriage.

In the final stanza of the poem, Whittier offers us this warning: **"For of all sad words of tongue or pen, The saddest are these: 'It might have been!'"** (by King Duncan from *Collected Sermons* at www.Sermons.com)

The Road to Holiness

Recently I was looking at some of my many files under the "quotes" folder. One such quote is called *The Road to Holiness*. A seeker after truth came to a saint for guidance. "Tell me, wise one, how did you become holy?" "Two words." "And what are they, please?" **"Right choices."** The seeker was fascinated. "How does one learn to choose rightly?" "One word." "One word! May I have it, please?" the seeker asked. **"Growth."** The seeker was thrilled. "How does one grow?" "Two words." "What are they, pray tell?" **"Wrong choices."**

I believe that this is God's purpose in times of testing, to help us grow and to show us that we have the faith and ability to stand up to the testing so that we will trust God in difficult times -- to strengthen our faith and Christian character.

At the same time, Satan has his own purpose -- to turn those being tested away from God -- to "tempt" them to sin. (by Brian Stoffregen from [*Exegetical Notes*](#))

Life Is a Test

One of my favorite posters says, "Life is a test. It is only a test. Had this been a real life you would have been instructed where to go and what to do." Whenever I think of this humorous bit of wisdom, it reminds me to not take my life so seriously.

As an experiment, see if you can apply this idea to something you are forced to deal with. Perhaps you have a difficult teenager or a demanding boss. See if you can redefine the issue you face from being a "problem" to being a test. Rather than struggling with your issue, see if there is something you can learn from it. Ask yourself, "Why is this issue in my life? What would it mean and what would be involved to rise above it? Could I possibly look at this issue any differently? Can I see it as a test of some kind?"

If you give this strategy a try you may be surprised at your changed responses. For example, I used to struggle a great deal over the issue of my perception of not having enough time. I would rush around trying to get everything done. I blamed my schedule, my family, my circumstances, and anything else I could think of for my plight. Then it dawned on me. If I wanted to be happy, my goal didn't necessarily have to be to organize my life perfectly so that I had more time, but rather to see whether I could get to the point where I felt it was okay that I couldn't get everything done that I felt I must. In other words, my real challenge was to see my struggle as a test.

Seeing this issue as a test ultimately helped me to cope with one of my biggest personal frustrations. I still struggle now and then about my perceived lack of time, but less than I used to. It has become far more acceptable to me to accept things as they are. (by Richard Carlson from *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff... and It's All Small Stuff*, New York, 1997)