

“It is Well with My Soul”

Sermon by Robb McCoy

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, used the power of small groups to share the Gospel. When he gathered with the group leaders, he would ask them a series of questions that probed their spiritual life. He would ask about their Bible study and prayer life. He would ask frank questions about their sin, and he believed that confession was an important step in the process. The question he was most famous for was, “How is it with your soul?”

Today, one of the first questions we often ask of each other is, “How are you doing?” Honestly though, this is more of a greeting than an actual question. We are seldom looking for a real answer. On the surface, these two questions seem similar, but we all know that “How are you doing?” is a much different question than “How is it with your soul?”

It is not an easy question to answer, but it is always worth pondering. It is so important to have people in your life who can ask that question of you. To be honest, it is not a question I’ve ever asked someone, but it is important to have people who ask you, “How are you doing?” and they really mean it.

In the past year I’ve had two groups of people I meet with, and they have been incredibly powerful. There are a group of men that gather together to ask this question of each other. We sit at a table together, say a short prayer, light a candle, and ask each other “How are you doing?” We share our struggles. We share our joys. We name our anxieties and our fears. We don’t give advice unless it is requested. We don’t offer solutions - but we empathize. We’ve never fixed any of each other’s problems, but we feel better for having shared them.

I have also met regularly with a group of Augustana College students. We have found a little study room where we share about the week. We pray together and we take time to breathe, sit in silence, listen to the Spirit. It has been one of the most rewarding things I’ve done in ministry - getting to know this small group of young people who worship with us most Sundays. I’ll truly miss them over the summer.



Phillip Bliss wrote the words to “It Is Well with My Soul” after the tragic death of his four daughters, who perished in a shipwreck in the Atlantic Ocean. He wrote it as he was sailing to meet his grieving wife, who survived the shipwreck. When the captain told him they were roughly over the spot where his daughters were lost, he sat down and wrote the hymn. Knowing the story makes the line “when sorrows like sea billows roll” all the more poignant.

I share the two wonderful experiences because I believe it is important to have people who want to know “How is it with your soul?” We sing the song, “It Is Well with My Soul,” even though often it isn’t. “The sorrows like sea billows roll,” in our lives. There is job stress, health concerns, world affairs. I was just with a friend who said to me, “I just feel irritated all the time.” We sing “It Is Well,” but is it really? How can it be?

Paul’s letter to the Corinthians reminds us of how it can be true. Through our suffering - the real life stuff that makes life hard - we know we are united in Christ. Jesus walked, healed, fed, taught, struggled, and wept. He was embraced and he was rejected. He knew suffering to the point of death - not to pay atonement to an angry God - but for the sake of intimacy. Jesus knew what suffering was so he could redeem our suffering. When life is a struggle, we know that we are connecting to Christ who was raised from the dead.

It is not always well with our soul, but that is why it is so important to have people you can share this with. This is what a Church should be - a place where we can bring our weary souls to find rest and healing. Worship, service, prayer, study - these are things that can heal. It is not always well with our soul, but we can always be connected to Christ who was raised. This is how we can gather and sing, “It is Well,” for we belong to Christ who has made us well through his Resurrection.