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## IT'S UP TO US

Psalms 22:1-11

I begin this sermon by first making a comment about the scripture passage. It is an unfortunate commentary about the writer who reflects a misconception of what God is all about and in the process neglects to do for himself what he ought to do. I can understand why.

It is very easy for us to sugar coat our concept of God, which to my way of thinking distorts theology. There are many examples of this but I have in mind particularly the Lord's Prayer. Among the many questions I have about this prayer, I single out one phrase: "Give us this day our daily bread" - bread, which can mean most anything. Give me, gimme seems to be by and large what the prayer is basically all about. We simply ask and it is given to us. Call on God, and why not Father, and what we want is dumped upon our laps.

The statement I've just referred to can easily put us in an asking mood bordering on selfishness. It avoids the need for a commitment on our parts to live "doingly" with our talents/abilities which I feel strongly is what our God certainly expects from us. Just ask and wait for the getting I conclude to be absurd theology, a theology in need of revamping.

It is simple for us to sidetrack the awesome challenge we face in confronting life with all of its demands, its ups and downs. Just ask God. That's our prayer. It is for this reason I have entitled this sermon IT'S UP TO US. Living life

most honestly calls for "DOING LIFE" with humility and especially commitment.

I would strongly highlight the word COMMITMENT because if the Bible accentuates one dynamic challenge it is that of commitment-- to a life of personal creative accomplishment. WE are encouraged to throw ourselves into life with "gusto." Whether or not we believe in God is not the point. I am inclined to believe that within us there is that innate longing to do for ourselves what we ought to do, lurking there waiting to burst forth like a blooming flower in the middle of July. You'll find there a sense of personal responsibility - - a responsibility that will not hide itself as an ugly face in a dark corner. I'm aware that this point of view seemingly puts prayer into question. I am aware, also, that it brings to mind an antiquated concept - a theology that has been spoon fed to humankind down through the centuries - a form of thought that beckons us to call anxiously on that One (some Supernatural being) waiting to deal with our many whims, wishes and fantasies. It appears most likely, as pointed out by Deepak Chopra, a bestselling author and lecturer, that "psychological and spiritual evolution is frozen to a level that is very tribal." (Charlotte Observer, Faith and Values, July 7. (I tell all my friends when I aggravate and seemingly threaten their belief system to talk with my cardiologist. I do that because I commented to him one day, jokingly, that I blame him for keeping me alive. So if I aggravate you in regard to my reflections, I suggest you contact him. Blame him for keeping me alive.)

Well, what we moderns must do is to wrestle with our responsibilities, doing what we must do for ourselves and other. How fallacious and foolish of us to think that after all, didn't God created

us and having done that why should we think of ourselves as being left out in the heat. We might conclude: where is God when I face my hardships, sufferings and overwhelming problems? Is this God whom we are encouraged to worship inept?

Or do we prefer to ignore dealing with our own ineptitude? I throw out to you this idea: is it likely that on most occasions, maybe for some individuals, on all occasions, a good psychological approach to life may prove to be healthier. Think about that. So I must stress that personal commitment to creative acts speaks to our duty, as we are encouragingly lured by God in that direction - not coerced -- not forced - but gently persuaded to deal with what we must personally deal with in every encounter that presses against us stretching out for that bread we want so very much. IT'S UP TO US!

Now, I would suggest, if I understand the Bible correctly, I do not believe God gets in the way or interrupts our cherished plan; nor does God drive us toward decisions we simply don't care to make. I would state that God, however, you wish to define God, as personal or abstract, as Hegel chose to define God, is not merely an interested bystander or one from whom we can flee. God's presence does not, however, in any way inhibit us from doing what we ourselves should and must do.

As for me, I feel strongly that God does give to me the assurance of love and comfort but cannot be content with my lack of effort to do what I must do for myself or fail to understand that the situations I encounter are unavoidable and come about with the force of randomness. As if to say, "You may lean on my everlasting arms but don't fall sleep in the process."

I think most of us have read enough psychology and have had enough experiences to know that indifference and the lack of commitment to responsible living can result into drastic, unfortunate happenings. I am inclined to feel that the practice of indifference and lack of commitment are more deadly than hostility! To act creatively is to live agonizingly for the good of self and others. So, frankly, it is up to us, should I understand theology as well as psychology appropriately. I believe it was Nietzsche who claimed, if I recall correctly, a thought which I now personally claim, that if we ever encounter a God who always does everything for us, who can cure a cold in the head or get us out of the rain as it begins to fall, that God would be absurd and have to be abolished, even if God existed.

I believe, too, that Keats, that genius tried by adversity, was on target when he wrote in essence that if the earth is a vale of soul making then we need a God who encourages us to do for ourselves, one who teaches us to get on our own rather than one who comforts us. For in our doing it is then that we shall most likely discover God.

How intriguing are his words in his Ode:

“Thus you live on high, and then  
On the earth you live again  
And the souls you left behind you  
Teach us, here, the way to find you  
Where your other souls are joying.  
Never slumber’d never cloying”

(That is, never hindered from their doing.)

(See KEATS p.102)

So, keep in mind that authentic, intensive living doesn't come from simplicity but from arduous backbreaking complexity. At the heart of meaningful existence is honest to goodness commitment to do for ourselves and others and that God is not the enforcer to bring about those happenings. We, I suggest, do not need one to pander to us with our selfish whims and fantasies to which I have already made reference and in the need of stressing.

I would point out as emphatically as I can that we must let God be God and let's not make of that God a servant on demand. Think of it this way: the God whom anyone would claim as theirs, I should think, would never let anyone run away from his/her humanness nor allow anyone to breeze through life with immunity or irresponsibility. Let's thank God that it is up to us more than we might realize.

In Ernest Becker's book THE DENIAL OF DEATH, (P189), the author states: "Beyond a given point a person is not helped by knowing but only by living and doing." Referring to one of Goethe's maxims, life is to go like this: "we must plunge( a very graphic picture) into experience and then reflect on the meaning of it. All reflection, however, and no plunging drives us mad and all plunging and no reflection and we are brutes." Goethe wrote maxims like this exactly at the time when daily life became a problem for him, when he wanted that bread, so to speak, when he no longer knew what were proper doses of experiences, which adds up to the DOING of life. If I understand him correctly, you and I are persuaded to get on with it.

It is up to us to get going, to experience the joy of living and the DOING. In actuality, IT IS UP TO US more than we would like to think--admittedly or not! It really is up to us! And to that I say with utter conviction: Amen and Amen!