

Here is advice from Dr. No Thing Wrong. Q: Doctor, I've heard that cardiovascular exercise can prolong life. Is this true? A: The heart is only good for so many beats, and that's it.....Don't waste any beats on exercise. Everything wears out eventually. Speeding up the heart does not make you live longer; it's like saying that you extend the life of a car by driving faster. Want to live longer? Take a nap.

Q: Should I reduce my alcohol intake? A: Oh no. Wine is made from fruit. Fruit is good for you! Brandy is distilled wine, which means they take water out of the fruity bit left so you get even more goodness that way. Beer is also made of grain. Bottoms up!

Q: What are some of the advantages of participating in a regular exercise program? A: Can't think of a single one, sorry. My philosophy: No pain – that's good!

Q. Aren't fried foods bad for you? A. ARE YOU NOT LISTENING? Fried food is fried in VEGETABLE OIL. How is getting more vegetable bad for you? (from an internet source sent via email)

This is a fascinating gospel on many levels. Jesus presents Himself as no optimistic incrementalist here; He's the anointed arsonist who has come "to cast fire upon the earth" (12:49). Not only is He eager to burn the whole thing down, He's getting impatient. He has come to purify the world by God's fiery love and wishes "it was already ablaze!" (12:49)

Since Jesus was already baptized by John in the Jordan back in chapter 3 of this gospel, it seems reasonable to conclude that the baptism Jesus is anticipating here refers to His passion and death. By passing through death to life, Jesus guarantees our own baptisms. Whereas John's baptism was the forgiveness of sins, the baptism in the church is also into Christ's death and resurrection. We get this from Paul's 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of the letter to the Romans which we hear at every Easter Vigil liturgy: "we were buried together with Him through baptism into His death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too can walk in newness of life." (Rom 6:4) Jesus had announced that He would soon have to be killed and raised up in Luke 9, so the disciples could not say that they had not been warned. Yet when Jesus describes the event, the disciples don't seem able to understand. The passage makes clear that the cross was always looming before Christ – that He knew what the culmination of the long journey to Jerusalem would be. Before the weight of Christ hung upon the cross, the weight of the cross, the weight of anticipation, hung upon Him. (PULPIT RESOURCE, Will Willimon, p. 22-23, July-Sept 2019)

Second, it is that baptism of cross and resurrection that definitively demonstrates that Jesus is indeed Lord over sin and death, that the power of this world cannot bind the One who is Love, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. If He is born to bring the kingdom of God to earth, then it is in the baptism of his suffering, death and resurrection that His kingship is proven and shown. With our own baptism, we are made participants in the world's salvation through Christ – not merely our own personal getting into heaven. We become part of the ongoing work of Christ in the world.

Which means that we now live in history's denouement, the working out of how to live after the climax of history – the cross. God's only son was born in a manger to die on a cross and rise again, and it was all for us, for all humanity, for the cosmos, for the restoration of all, for all to be someday drawn into the kingdom of God where nothing is wasted, and all will be made new. (Willimon, p. 24)

Third. But this sounds all like poetry or nonsense. What does it have to do with us? And how does this happen? Is it at all REAL? The French priest-paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin wrote: "The day will come when, after harnessing the atmosphere, the winds, the tides, and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love. And, on that day, for the second time in the history of the world, we will have discovered fire." ("The Evolution of Chastity," in TOWARD THE FUTURE, p. 87) The fire is the energy of love, which is something all of us know about, for we have experienced it. We crave it, we search for it, we try to live it. And it is a power that literally can change the world.

Teilhard says elsewhere "a spark was first struck, a point that was built into me congenitally, the world gradually caught fire for me, burst into flames; this happened all *during* my life, and *as a result of* my life, until it formed a great luminous mass, lit from within, that surrounded me." (THE HEART OF THE MATTER, p. 15) We believe that because of US, who are the Body of Christ here on earth NOW, because of LOVE, God continues to bring His creation – flawed, broken and scarred as it is – into perfection.

And you can say that I am mad to believe this – or to propose that we all SHOULD believe it. What could be further from the truth? Look at the state of our world – look at the state of our country! All the great religious traditions, not least Christianity, assure us that we are in safer hands on the other side of this world than we are here – which should leave us with little to fear on this side because eventually all graves will be empty, including our own. Oscar Wilde once put it: "Everything is going to be fine in the end. If it's not fine, it's not the end."

Again, Chardin. He protested that he was a man of hope rather than simple optimism. Remember this priest was also a famous scientist. He was once giving a presentation to a group of scientists, who objected to his vision of hope. One scientist stood up and asked what would happen if we blew up the world with atomic bombs. Chardin thought for a moment and then replied that it would set things back several million years. But God's plan for the earth would still come about. Why? Because Christ promised it and, in the resurrection, God shows that He has the power to deliver on that promise. Hope is based upon God's promise and God's power.

But there is still another reason for our hope, something else that grounds it and gives us sufficient reason to live in trust that eventually all will be well – namely, God's inexhaustibility. Underneath and beneath us and our universe is *a well that nothing exhausts*.

And this is what we so often forget -- or slim down to the limited size of our own hearts and imaginations: God is a prodigal God, completely unimaginable in the scope of physical creation, a God who has created and is still creating billions upon billions of universes. Moreover, Jesus revealed to us that this is a prodigal God, so beyond our imagination in creativity and equally unimaginable in patience and mercy. There is never an end to our number of chances. There is no limit to God's patience. There is no limit to His love. There is nothing that can ever exhaust the divine well. As Julian of Norwich said: "And all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of being shall be well." Amen. (help from Ronald Rolheiser, WRESTLING WITH GOD, p. 194-196, 136-138)