

Getting back to “NORMAL”

I like NORMAL. A sense that my life and the world around me will be stable. That I am assured that all things will be ok and not disruptive today. And of course, that my future will be bright and abundant.

NORMALLY, I prepare breakfast with variations on the servings of the day but I am sure that each day is assigned its serving. Monday is “Pancake Day”. I look forward to that day in particular. Each morning I exercise, Tuesday through Thursday is my expected work days. Me and Jesus time is mostly regular but certainly could be improved in time and quality.

But disruptions to our NORMAL routines and expectations invade our lives. What to do?

Now that the 2020 elections have been endured and finalized, we can certainly get back to “NORMAL” can’t we. With all of the drama and contention through the political ads and the competing news channels, we welcome the “NORMALCY” that is sure to come. But a reality check would surely indicate to all of us that the political drama will not end but continue unabated.

And oh yes, that pandemic thing...I really want to get back to “NORMAL”, don’t you?

To me normal would be to attend my grandson’s High School football games on Friday nights with the crowds, the cheering and the occasional boos. Dining out with the fun of fellow diners, the laughter and smiles and the great food is missed. Don’t we look forward to the end of mask wearing, sanitizing gel, constant washing of the hands, and virtual church and pretend hugs from friends?

I was reflecting upon a simple historical looking back and wondered when has there been a NORMAL?

- Great Recession 2008-09
- Flash mob events, Hip Hop music, Breakdancing
- 9/11/2001 Attack, Airport – shoes & belt off, empty pockets...etc.
- Michael Jackson and Moon Walk
- Savings & Loan Crisis 80's and 90's
- Bee Gees and John Travolta & Disco or Village People YMCA
- 1973 Oil Crisis & gas line waits
- Vietnam War 60's and 70's, sit ins, anti-war marches
- Beatles and the Hippy Spin & Gurus & Summer of Love
- Kennedys & King Assassinations in the 60's, conspiracies
- Cuban missile crisis Oct 1962: Under desks, backyard bomb shelters
- Elvis, Chubby Checker and the twist
- Korean War early 50's, Red Scare & Joe McCarthy
- Glenn Miller and Duke Ellington & swing dance
- Pearl Harbor and WWII: Hitler, Tojo,
- 30's Great Depression: Soup kitchens, CCC
- 1929 Stock market crash & Black Monday suicides
- Roaring Twenty's and the Charleston: Al Capone, bootlegging
- 1919 Spanish Flu: 50 million dead worldwide

Maybe a historical "NORMAL" has not ever been a reality? Maybe it could better be said that history is "ABNORMAL". A good friend of mine told me that the only thing that is NORMAL is the selection on our clothes washer and dryer.

When looking at our personal history as we began our lives immediately from our mother's womb, change and disruption seem to be the norm. From a baby to adolescence then on to teenage years, young adult then married seems a lifetime ago but a memory of change and disruptions to what I considered "NORMAL" never was. When the kids arrived as a joint agreement between husband and wife, we surely did not realize the wonders but often upheaval such change

brings. The older we progress through life, change and going from one NORMAL life to another NORMAL life is constant. Now let's include the changes that come with age such as diminished capacity to be as physically active or mentally acute to do what we once did. Our rationalizing of what we think we can do collides with reality. NORMAL may be only a passing and brief experience during our lives.

We seek to have a NORMAL sense of life because it allows us to have stability, a quality of calm that will not change. Also, we seek an assurance within our circumstances that promotes a confidence that life will be ok. And finally, we like to have an expectation that we can eagerly look forward to what comes next.

So maybe we should consider what and how we see what NORMAL should be.

When tumult, upheaval or crisis invades our lives, when NORMAL has been altered and life events are marching through our lives with an unknown outcome...when our desire for normalcy seems elusive, how do we respond? Does anger or worry dominate us or does a calm and peace settle upon our soul? Do we sink into a despair we can't climb out of or do we face the circumstance with humble confidence? Is it fear that overwhelms us or do we trust that all things work together for good for those call according to His purpose?

Life can be very a very tough go. The impact is real and should be recognized as so. We are unique and are of differing personalities and backgrounds therefore our reactions may differ as well. Respecting those differences is an indication how His grace has influenced our response when we or our friends or acquaintances face what seems overwhelming circumstances.

With that in mind, what should we avoid doing and what actions should we move toward during disruptions that tip over our NORMAL?

A recent newspaper cartoon made me chuckle but also had a message on how some might handle disruption. In the cartoon there were three characters: Goat – representing the clear thinking and wise, Pig – representing the reactive and self-absorbed, and Rat – representing the cynical and sarcastic. The scene begins with Goat quizzing Pig about his apparent anxiety saying, "Hey Pig, where are you

off to?” Pig obviously disturbed replies, “With all that’s going on, I really need to do some spiritual healing!” Then Goat assuming the best and suggesting options says, “That’s wise Pig. Would you be going to church, taking a time of prayer and meditation?” But Pig responds in his despair, “Buying Pizza!” Of course Rat comments, “Pig is a true believer.”

The point to be taken that when disruption to our NORMAL lives takes place, how does a person react and manage a circumstance. The metaphor suggests that a person may choose beneficial approach or maybe not.

Disruptions enter into our life in various directions. This could be within our existing relationship, our health be it physical, emotional or financial. As we have discussed, our culture, nation and world continue to encounter disruptions. And right now by the reality of attending church through a streaming service due to a pandemic is obvious.

Let’s review a scripture that gives perspective and instruction on how we should respond when our NORMAL is tipped over.

Psalms 9:10 says, “Those who know your name trust in you, for you, O Lord, do not abandon those who search for you”

This “knowing” God is to be singular and imperative. That is our vital relationship with the Living God. Our life depends upon this relationship. When uncertainties confront us, to know God is to trust Him. It is our foundation as we live this life. This relationship grows and strengthens as we search Him out. Our time spent moving toward intimacy with Christ and growing in our submission and joy toward His Lordship. This searching includes absorbing His love letters into our soul, intimate conversations with Him that will be reflected in expressing His love to others.

As a Christian, this “**KNOWING GOD**” should be our **NORMAL**. What is meant by this is the following:

1. HIS **STABILITY** gives a quality of calm, our faith in HIM now
2. HIS **ASSURANCE** is confidence of His provision and promises

3. **EXPECTATION** that our future is sure because of His everlasting love

This **NORMAL** is knowing that we are fully accepted by grace and that we are made anew in Christ to do what he planned for us long ago. Ephesians 2:8-10

Remember Pig and his response. He went for his “Comfort food”. This is what was normal to Pig. Pizza was his escape from what was happening in his life. Easy to obtain, easy to eat and easy to satisfy...or maybe not. People many times seek to escape through denial, repeating failed strategies or live with the illusion that everything will return to NORMAL.

I chuckle at my little delusions. When I get my haircut, the stylist remarks when I ask for my senior discount, “Oh, you don’t look 65)”, which immediately goes to my head (I am really 68). Now back at work, I think I can cram 2 days’ work into one day...are you kidding me? At times I think that I can handle my work challenges (Hospice chaplain) without emotional weariness...not so much. Usually jokingly, I will say, “If I were King, I could fix that,”...really? And mostly true when I have another birthday my definition of “old” changes.

I try to remind myself that the older I am the less I know and for what I was once sure of may not be now. Every opinion has an agenda including my own...so is it meant for good is it questionable? As for my assumption of my life’s endurance, a wise woman reminded me of my own mortality after my attempted encouragement of her impending departure to heaven by saying, “I might get though the afternoon and you might not!” I was very careful the remainder of the day!

This knowing and searching for the Living God may begin with a simple and direct discussion with God Himself. We might ask Him help us unpack our emotions and feelings and to open our thinking to options that would be within His moral will. To express our desire to get to know Him better and better and to bring calm into our heart and to remind and reassure us of His promises. As I release my desires and self-will and move toward submission to His will, I know He is with me though

it may or may not be apparent. That this faith and trust in God we must walk toward.

Our faith transition as a believer begins with new life and moves from spiritual death to the beginnings of spiritual life then on to a maturing spiritual life and finally to everlasting life.

Jerry and Olivia are friends of mine (true names not given). Jerry had accepted Christ only in the past three years and his wife had passed the year before. Yet he knew the Living God. His death was imminent but he always expressed his lack of worry. With COPD his breathing would deteriorate and it would be tough. When I joined him just prior to being unconscious, through the fog of the moment he looked at me and said, "Cool." Jerry's **NORMAL** was a daily life with Jesus and His provision.

Olivia resides in an assisted living facility. She has significant physical pain and she is emotionally tired. But being sure of Jesus' steadfast love for her she mused about others that don't have that relationship, "A lot of people say they believe in God, but they don't do anything about it...why".

Maybe that answer resides with Job's response in the midst of his turmoil. *"But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives and he will stand upon the earth at last. And after my body has decayed, yet in my body I will see God. I will see him for myself. Yes, I will see him with my own eyes. I am overwhelmed at the thought!" (JOB 19: 25-27).*

For JOB, there were more than the religious practices and a godly lifestyle that held him together in his turmoil of losing his family, wealth, health...failed friends & spouse. For JOB, his **NORMAL** was that **GOD** was life itself. Everything else was temporary. He had a stability of knowing his loving Redeemer was sovereign and would not abandon him. He had a confident assurance that His Redeemer's

promises would happen. And he fully expected his future was secure and in the end, he would be with his God no matter what.

We can be sure that life will be disrupted and NORMAL may be brief and elusive. People react in various ways when those disruptions occur. Disruptions should not be diminished, they can bring great turmoil. Jerry knew that, Olivia knows that we cannot expect life to be normal.

As with the psalmist and JOB, they knew that only **ONE** source could and would give the **TRUE NORMAL.....JESUS IS OUR LORD AND SAVIOR.**

Before all time

In this present

Beyond all time

When all things are not normal, go with Christ Jesus and His sustaining love.

That is the only true **NORMAL** in our lives.

