

Some years ago, a man was checking into a hotel

When he noticed behind the counter

What he took to be the hotel's mission statement:

**THERE ARE NO PROBLEMS, ONLY OPPORTUNITIES.**

Given the key to his room,

He rode the elevator to the eighth floor,

Walked down the hall,

Slid the electronic key card in the slot

And opened the door to his assigned room

Only to be greeted by a large snarling dog.

In near panic,

He inched his way around to the phone at the elevator,

Called the front desk,

And stammered out,

*I have a problem in my room!*

To which the desk clerk responded,

***Sir, at this hotel,***

***there are no problems,***

***only opportunities!***

*You can call it what you want, mister,* the patron replied,

*But there's a snarling dog attack dog in my room*

*Ready to attack me and I need some help immediately!*

[PAUSE]

There is that sense of urgency in today's gospel lesson

As Jesus responds to the disciples' anxiety

About the signs and signals concerning the end-times:

- How will one know?
- What should one do?
- Who will be saved?

[PAUSE]

Most of us in our lifetimes

Have had these questions posed to us at our front-doors

By pairs of Bible-carrying laypersons

Canvassing the neighborhood

I remember the twenty hours  
 When my appreciation and understanding  
 Of their faith-practices changed forever.

[PAUSE]

It is said that just one piece of information  
 Has the capacity to stop a rolling juggernaut in an instant.  
 The trauma surgeons had crossed and typed the blood  
 Of the teen female driver with a severely broken lower leg  
 Preparing to give the patient a blood transfusion  
 When the chaplain discovered a piece of information  
 That stopped the whole process in an instant:  
*The patient is a practicing Jehovah's Witness.*

The nurses stepped back  
 As the frustrated angry surgeons and surgical residents  
 Pondered what had to happen next  
 To treat the broken leg and the whole woman.

Two hours later,  
 The chaplain was part of an Ethics Consultation  
 With lawyers, doctors, nurses, the woman's parents.  
 The parents were holding to their faith-belief:  
*No transfusion even if death resulted.*

The matter was heard by a sitting judge that later evening  
 Who ruled that the teen be given the transfusion  
 Only as a last medical resort prior to surgery.

[PAUSE]

Early the next morning,  
 The chaplain encountered the teen's father at the elevator.  
 The father immediately thanked the chaplain for his efforts  
 And embraced him with a hug of sincere gratitude.  
 The father explained that the daughter had received a transfusion  
 And was heading into surgery, as we spoke, to repair her broken bones.  
 Sensing the defeat of faith and values, I spoke apologetically:  
*I am so very saddened and remorseful  
 That you did not prevail in your faith beliefs  
 Around the transfusion matter.*

And then the father said something that I will never forget:

*There is no need to apologize.*

*You did everything to assist us.*

*You gave us space and the place to declare our testimony of God*

*And that is more important than a transfusion*

*Our daughter will be blessed with God's healing.*

[PAUSE]

***You gave us a space and the place to declare our testimony of our God***

What I determined was a defeat of faith and belief

Was clearly a victory in faithful living in the Lord by the patient's father!

**The problem had become an opportunity!**

[PAUSE]

It is said that the Chinese characters

That form word **OPPORTUNITY**

Are the characters for **challenge** and **danger**.

In the Temple story in today's gospel lesson,

Jesus tells us that

- When we follow him as disciples,
- When we say yes to being a Christian,

We position our lives

In some of the most challenging of places

We can ever imagine.

For those living in the first century,

It meant persecution, arrest, prison, even death.

Within our lifetimes,

Some still pay the ultimate price for being a Christian;

While many more experience ridicule and derision.

To embrace our Lord's values,

To love our enemies,

To speak peace in the presence of conflict

To offer reconciliation in the midst of division

Requires courage and faithfulness.

Therein is the choice each/all of us

Must make every day God gives us to live. >>

The choice to testify and witness to our belief in Christ Jesus  
 And to be seen as Christians

- In our speech,
- In our actions,
- In our lifestyles,
- In our values

Is a choice every one of us makes every day.

On 11 December 1845,

Harvard Law School graduate / New England poet

And noted abolitionist James Russell Lowell

Published a long poem in the *Boston Courier* entitled

“Verses Suggested by the Present Crisis:”

(In the old *SBH*, it was sung to *Ebenezer*)

*1 Once to ev'ry man and nation*

*Comes the moment to decide,*

*In the strife of truth and falsehood,*

*For the good or evil side;*

*Some great cause, some great decision,*

*Off'ring each the bloom or blight,*

*And the choice goes by forever*

*'Twixt that darkness and that light.*

*2 Then it is the brave man chooses*

*While the coward stands aside.*

*Till the multitude make virtue*

*Of the faith they had denied.*

*3 New occasions teach new duties,*

*Ancient values test our youth;*

*They must upward still and onward,*

*Who would keep abreast of truth.*

The Prayer of the Day this 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Invites us to trust in God's mercy

In the face of every opportunity

That might expose us to challenge and danger,

So that *we may live through what is temporary*

*without losing what is eternal....*

[PAUSE]

So much about our lives is about im-per-man-ence,

So much around us is temporal and short-lived.

Mainline church buildings are closing...

Major appliances last 7 years...

Our bodies are prone to wear and tear...

Our brains are shrinking and slowing.

Nothing is permanent...

Mighty temples fall and magnificent structures crumble.

Nothing is lasting...

Occupations and corporations and paychecks cease to exist

And marriages and families break apart.

Nothing endures...

**Except** God and God's Word of Promise.

Just as stones thrown down from a building

Reveal destruction and a temporal ending,

So, too, can *a stone be rolled away from a tomb*

*To reveal a new beginning into eternal joy and fulfillment*

In his first best-selling book,

*Everything I Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten,*

Robert Fulghum tells the story of a medieval stonemason

Who was working on a Cathedral.

An interested bystander saw the man working day after day

Carefully cutting/ shaping/ polishing

One modest sized piece of stone.

After many days, the constant watcher said to the cutter

*This stone must be very important.*

*Is it a part of the baptismal font?*

*Is it the base of the pulpit?*

*Is it the front of the altar?’*

The cutter got up from his knees and wiped his hands

Then led the man around the scaffolding

And pointed out a very obscure inside corner of the building,

*It goes there, he said.*

The onlooker was astounded,

*Really, you’re working so hard on something nobody will see?*

The stonecutter smiled and said,

*God will see it.*

*We’re not building this cathedral for nobody;*

*We’re building it for God.*

First Peter declared that we are living stones...

Patterned after **the Stone**, Jesus,

Readied • to be build into a spiritual house

• to be a chosen race

• to be a royal body of priests

• to be a holy nation,

God’s own people

In order that we might proclaim

The mighty acts of the One who called us

Out of our worldly darkness of sin

Into God’s marvelous light.

May we learn to proclaim

The God in Jesus Christ

Who came to redeem sin / conquer death

Making out of a problem about a cross and a grave

The OPPORTUNITY FOR LIFE ETERNAL.