

# The Power of Possibility Thinking

## *Third Sunday in Advent*

*Published in the Ministry District of Yorke Peninsula*

### Sunday, December 13, 2020

It never ceases to amaze me how **History** is really the story of individuals, who make a difference to all who follow after them. An action or a way of thinking turns the course of history on a new path. This is not always for the better, but there is this element of the power of one to change life for all on earth. This is why biography is such a powerful literary medium, as it draws us into the process of change itself.

Perhaps it is worth noting that although many of us resist change, preferring the status quo, history is about change and turning points, and history makers are agents of change.

Now I was born in the 50's and raised in the '60's and there have been many elements of change influencing my life and my lifetime, and I have had the privilege to live through some remarkable events. The advances in science and technology over this period have been truly amazing. As we moved to the new millennium, we had the opportunity to reflect on how the world appeared to our forebears facing the year 1900. Their hopes and dreams and how little they could have imagined. The rise of the nostalgic programmes on TV is absolutely fascinating and they are often a cause for much reflection about the world in which we live in, even now as we are twenty years into the new century.

Now there are many things that I could draw from this experience, but I would like to just pick one. There is a book that came out in 1952 that influenced many people. "The Power of Positive Thought" by Norman Vincent Peale is one. Norman Vincent Peale was born: in 1898, in Bowersville, Ohio. Norman Vincent Peale was one of the most influential clergymen in the United States during the 20th-century. Ordained in the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1922, Peale served as pastor at a succession of churches before changing his affiliation to the Dutch Reformed Church so that he could become pastor of the Marble Collegiate Church in New York City (1932–84). Peale's simple, optimistic, and dynamic sermons, in which he offered a positive outlook on modern living brought increasing numbers of parishioners and increasing fame to Peale. His sermons were regularly broadcast, first on radio and later on television. In addition, Peale published a weekly newsletter for businessmen, Guideposts, which reached two million subscribers at its apex. Peale died in 1993.

I cannot tell you if I have actually read his book, but I know of its philosophy, and have lived many years in a world that has been influenced by it. Positive thoughts can change things. There is power in the mind.

Indeed the movements of Peace and Love of the sixties have very much of this element in them – if we forget war and think only peace and love (then every thing will work out). It is not so much that Peale was the direct founder of these movements, but his way of thinking created the space for them to flourish.

I believe there is some truth in what this thinking promotes, and certainly it is much better to face the world with optimism rather than pessimism, there is also an absurdity about this as well. In Monty Python's quest for the Holy Grail, the black knight with arms and legs cut off, claims his injuries are only a scratch and seeks to continue the fight.

What Norman Vincent Peale missed, was not that positive thought was required, but rather possibility thought. It is not the thinking of good thoughts that is important, but rather the thinking that there are possibilities that are presented in every situation and that these are God given opportunities that as we co-operate with him can bear fruit. As we light the third candle today in memory of Mary, we are reminded of the possibilities that her Yes gave. It was not that she thought good thoughts, but rather that she was open to allow God to act. The possibilities were not within, but within God.

Now at a baptism we have a choice in these two ways of thinking. We can think that this thing that we do today is a 'good and positive' thing. Certainly, I believe that God will honour this event, but it is not enough for us to see it as something Good. Parents and Godparents and indeed the whole Christian community owe each child a lot more. When Mary said "Yes to God" the child she carried offered the world something new and different and the possibility of a new and different relationship with our Father in Heaven. When we take part in a baptism, we owe it to the child to open up these God-Given opportunities. We owe it to them to think in terms of the possibilities – This child may be a new Billy Graham, or perhaps a Bishop, or a good husband and father walking in the knowledge of Jesus and leading his family in this path. He may find the cure for Aids, or walk on Mars, or serve the world in a small and obscure village.

I am not talking about the natural wishful thinking of parents here, but rather the understanding that with God all things are possible. As Parents and Godparents and indeed as the whole Christian Community, we have duty to each child to introduce them to Jesus, to the God of possibilities and open them up for them. The promises made reflect a commitment to bring them up under God's influence. This is not humanly possible without ourselves also making these commitments. When the Angel came to Mary – she had an opportunity to participate in God's work. It was her obedience that allowed her to be a part of the salvation plan for the world. All of us have the opportunity daily to serve God, and participate in his plan of salvation of the world, but we each have that choice.

As a district also we are called to see possibilities and to grasp them. We are not called to just to maintain the buildings, but to think in terms of expanding the Kingdom – of bringing new people under the influence of the Gospel and into

relationship with Jesus. Norman Vincent Peale was right to say that we should not be trapped by the apparent difficulties that we face, but the solution is not within our own thoughts, but rather in our obedience to our Heavenly Father – the God of possibilities.

As we baptise this child and indeed any child, we open up a whole new set of possibilities for God. Let us have the courage to grasp them and the trust in God to let him take control. We do not know the future, but we do know the God who will with us. This is the meaning of Christmas – Emmanuel – God who is with us. May we always be aware of his presence and may we also see the possibilities that his presence provides. I would like to finish with a poem that appeared on a Christmas card we received.

### **ONE SOLITARY LIFE**

He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in still another village, where he worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty. Then for three years he was an itinerant preacher. He never wrote a book. He never had a family or owned a house. He didn't go to college. He never visited a big city. He never travelled two hundred miles from where he was born. He did none of the things one usually associates with greatness. He had no credentials but himself. He was only thirty-three when the tide of public opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. He was turned over to his enemies and went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. While he was dying, his executioners gambled for his clothing, the only property he had on earth. When he was dead, he was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend. Nineteen centuries have come and gone, and today he is the central figure of the human race and the leader of humankind's progress.

All the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of humanity on this earth as much as that

### **ONE SOLITARY LIFE.**

And that life was possible because one person said yes to God.

**AMEN.**