

“Let Go and Let God”
Isaiah 41:10, Proverbs 3: 5-6, and Hebrews 11:1

I was at a non-church meeting a couple of months ago and a comment was made that I thought was really sad. We were talking about our faith beliefs. One of the females in the group said, “I don’t believe in anything other than myself. I’ve been told that I’m intelligent and strong and I don’t need anyone but me. I think it’s weak to rely on a made-up God.”

Wow! I find that statement to be somewhat lonely and scary and, quite frankly, a little audacious. Please don’t misunderstand me. I believe in personal empowerment. And I think it’s great when people are confident and self-assured, particularly females who are only in recent years being recognized as being on the same level playing field as men are. But I can’t imagine feeling like I alone, without relying on anyone else or spiritual support, should be able to handle the vicissitudes of life. What or who do you turn to in the middle of the night when you wake up overcome by anxiousness about something over which you have no control? How do you calm yourself when the burden of being in charge becomes overwhelming or you have a catastrophic illness or one of your children is in deep trouble with drugs or alcohol? What a gloomy thought that some people feel as if they are all alone in their struggles and grief and that there is no spiritual support and love that can be tapped in to.

The thing is that feeling like we can control absolutely everything in our lives is a pie-in-the-sky dream. I’ve shared with a few of you some of my story about our angst with our oldest son. At 20 years old, our son went through what is now being called a “starter marriage”. It was a bad time for our entire family but it

was a particularly a bad time for me. I spent a lot of time trying to control the uncontrollable.

Our oldest son married a 19-year-old woman who was obviously an alcoholic. They supposedly had an “open” marriage. In other words, their agreement was that either one of them could sleep with whomever they wanted at any time. My memories are of sitting on our back porch with our son and his fiancée before they were married trying to reason with them about how open marriage has been tried before by many people and it inevitably does not work. I was accused by our son of being closed-minded, unaccepting, and controlling, some of which was certainly true. My conversations with the two of them got, to put it mildly, quite heated. It eventually came to the point where our son refused to talk with me about anything. This went on for over two years. Interestingly, the day of the wedding I completely lost my voice. I couldn’t say one word to anyone. God does work in mysterious ways.

The end of this story is that the bride, our new daughter-in-law, decided to exercise this open marriage option pretty quickly when they got married. She was a bartender and had endless opportunities to meet men. This seemingly took our son completely by surprise. The marriage lasted all of five months and our son is now happily married for the last ten years to a lovely woman with a PhD who works at the Feinberg School of Medicine and we are once again on good terms.

The point of this story is to share with you my growth edge, so to speak, through those couple of troubling years. I was astonished at the trajectory of our son’s life back when he was twenty. He was a good kid and we were a church going family. Our three children, up until that point, had pretty much done what they were expected to do. Now that they’re adults, I am hearing some stories from their high school years that I’m glad I didn’t know about at the time, but they did nothing out of the ordinary that would completely alarm a parent. In other words, I

was used to controlling the kids and at least some of their behavior. So, it was a shock the first time I came up against one of the kids doing something that I thought was a big mistake and I couldn't control the situation.

Whenever we face out-of-control situations, we tend to go to one of two extremes. For some of us, the more out-of-control things get, the harder we try to control the situation. And, some of us do the exact opposite: We just give up! We have a pity party and invite ourselves to it. Both of those reactions to not being in control are foolish. They don't work. Instead of being a victim or becoming hyper controlling the only choice we have is to surrender.

It took a lot of maturing for me to come to the realization that I have no control over my adult children. I have since come to understand that acceptance of whatever they decide to do is the answer. When I'm disturbed by anything in life, it is because I find some person, place, or situation unacceptable. I can find no peace, no serenity, unless I accept that a person, place, or situation as being exactly as it is meant to be at the moment. The key to happiness and serenity is accepting life on life's terms. It's sometimes a lot easier to focus on others instead of focusing on ourselves. But I've found that I need to concentrate not so much on what needs to be changed in other people as on what needs to be changed in me.

I don't know what you're going to face this week. None of us know what the future will bring. But I can tell you what God wants you to do: Let go and know. Let go of control and know that God is in control. We are not in control – God is. This is the first step to serenity in all our lives.

The number one reason we are under stress is because we are trying to control things that only God can control. I know here at Lake Street Church I can't control congregants, our church staff, Hilda's Place, our church Board, our confirmation kids, or the Senior Minister Search Committee. Heck, I can't even control our worship services. I can't vet everything that is said or done during

worship. Worship isn't a performance and I'm not the director. The more I try to direct and control, the more I try to play God, I end up exhausted. I have faith that the Divine has all our backs and I have faith that God will put the right words in my head and heart and will do the same for others.

I wonder how different those difficult years with our oldest son would have been if I had let go of trying to talk those two young adults out of the concept of an open marriage. It became obvious to both of them very soon after tying the knot that they had made a mistake. My begging and pleading for them to listen to what I thought were my words of wisdom didn't change anything. All I did was ruin my relationship with my son for a number of years.

The lesson for me is to "let go and let God". Let go of trying to control my adult children. Let go of my expectation that I will preach a barn-burner sermon every Sunday. Let go of thinking I should be able to control what other people say during worship. Let go of the expectation that we will have a perfect worship service that ends exactly at 11:30 every single Sunday.

I encourage all of us to trust the Divine – trust that the Spirit will guide this church and direct our lives. We are not in charge. God is. So, let's all let go and let God be the director of this church and our lives.

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