

Column

Many moons ago I was set to board a train from London to Edinburgh. Arriving at King's Cross station, I opened my wallet to pull out my pre-purchased travel card only to discover it wasn't there. Thinking back, I remembered sweeping the clutter off the dresser into the dustbin at the hotel where I was staying. No doubt, that is where my travel card was.

Of course, there was no way of retrieving it. The only way I was going to get on the train was to buy another ticket, which I did at the princely sum of \$100 (this was 1992). To make matters worse, I was traveling with a party of eight or ten others, all of whom had sensibly kept up with their travel cards. As I dashed to the ticket counter, I shouted, "Go ahead, board the train. I'll catch up with you."

After securing my new ticket, I ran and jumped on a train bound for Edinburgh. Almost immediately, the doors closed, and it began moving. Walking through the carriages, I looked for my party, but to no avail. They apparently were on another train.

At this point, I sank down in a seat in a state of misery. Not only was I separated from my friends, I had thrown away \$100. After about half an hour, it came to me that I had two choices: I could continue to dwell on the wasted \$100 and be miserable the rest of my holiday, or I could chalk up my foolish carelessness as a lesson, put the missing money behind me and enjoy the rest of my trip. I chose the latter option.

These same two – to dwell on the past and what can't be changed or move forward -- are always present. I have known folk – and you probably have as well – who go through life fretting over something that happened in the past. Perhaps this point of pain had to do with mistakes their parents, wittingly or unwittingly, made during their growing-up years.

I knew one woman, absolutely brilliant and well accomplished in her career, who blamed all her psychological maladjustments on her strict upbringing . . . her mother wouldn't let her go to dances, wear makeup and made her sing at funerals of people she didn't know. Almost to the end of her life, she would dredge up these memories and recount them. In so doing, she deprived herself of much contentment and happiness, to say nothing of wearying those around her.

I would never want to discount anyone's pain. Past experiences, especially those from childhood, can and often do leave scars and call for professional help. Yet, at the end of the day, people have choices, the same choices I had on that railway carriage.

You can cling to, feed and be defined by past grievances and hurts, or you can move ahead. The choice is yours. Looking back and working through them may at times be therapeutic, but to hold that posture too long and you'll get a crick in your neck, both actually and metaphorically.

What I have said about grievances and hurts inflicted by others is true about our own personal bad choices and actions (in Christian parlance, sins). We can let those things define us and distort our lives . . . continue to go down the wrong path. Or we can do an about turn. We can confess and leave them at the cross of Calvary; make amends, if possible, to anyone we have hurt; and move forward. Again, the choice is ours, with the Holy Spirit giving us not only the will but the power to carry through.

“Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus,” says the apostle Paul (Philippians 3:12-14). Here he is thinking about positive achievements during his years in Gospel ministry; nevertheless, his words hold whatever our past.

Thinking back to that railway trip to Scotland, maybe that \$100 was not lost after all. A valuable lesson was learned.

O GOD, who hast prepared for those who love thee such good things as pass man's understanding; Pour into our hearts such love toward thee, that we, loving thee above all things, may obtain thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen. (Collect for the Sixth Sunday after Trinity, Book of Common Prayer.

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