

The (un)certain future

We don't know the future.

None of us has a crystal ball to investigate and see what the future holds. So, any idea we have of the future is inherently uncertain. And in today's uncertain world, doubly so. There can always be a so-called "Black Swan" that none of us can predict, which will properly shuffle the cards and the course of events.

Sometimes we don't mind.

But we don't always mind an uncertain future. Sometimes we even wish we didn't know how things will turn out. Like when we're watching a detective story or a sports game. If we know the outcome, it takes all the fun out of it.

When do we mind:

The stress of an uncertain future appears in us when 2 basic conditions are met:

- if we do not believe that we have the capacity to resolve the situation that will arise in the future.
- and we care enough about the outcome of the situation (the imaginary stakes are high enough).

For example, the risk of your fridge, washing machine or car breaking down at home and you suddenly having a large unplanned expense will cause a very different level of stress for a person who has hundreds of thousands sitting in their account and a different stress reaction for a single mother who has to take care of her 2 small children and has the last 1,500 CZK left by the end of the month. Because each of them will perceive differently their capacity to solve the problem that would arise.

Similarly, I personally do not care how the current Champions League football season turns out, because I do not follow it and do not really care. However, it would be a different situation if I had my entire family savings at stake in a particular club winning. Then I'd be watching the results of all the games, the health of the players and wondering every day how it would turn out.

What Bible says?

We start from the letter to the Philippians. It was written by the apostle Paul while he was in prison in Rome. From this letter, it is possible that he was in a very precarious situation. He didn't know when he was going to be tried, if he was going to be convicted, or if he was going to stay alive. And yet it's a letter full of hope and joy. And not fear and stress, as one might expect. How's that?

Capacity - At the end of this letter (Philippians 4:12-13), we see that Paul believed that with God's help he could handle any situation that came up. He says that he can have both lack and abundance. That he had experienced both. What it is like to have more than enough and what it is like to have nothing. What it's like to be full and what it's like to be hungry. But whatever life has brought him he has made it through with the Lord God because "I am able to do all things through him who gives me strength.

The stakes – It is said that "if it's not about life, it's not about anything". Or that the highest stake we can play for in life is life itself. You can sense from Paul in this letter that he has no fear of death. On the contrary, he seems almost to welcome the possibility of meeting it. It is as if it were an old friend of his, just transporting him to His Lord, whom he so looks forward to meeting. That is why the famous phrase is heard in the letter, that "for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain."

To numb the stress of what is currently happening, a technique called the 10/10/10 Rule is sometimes used. It involves asking yourself if it will matter in 10 minutes, 10 months, 10 years. Because the longer perspective we give to what is happening right here and now, the more we reduce our stress levels around it. But the Apostle Paul doesn't stop here with the perspective of 10 years, he adds the perspective of eternity. For in the light of eternity, the things that make our minds so heavy now pale.

What can we do about it?

God wants us to strive to the extent of our capacity. We cannot just sit back with our hands folded and expect Him to take care of everything. When you are facing a difficult exam in school, it is not enough to just pray and put no effort into studying. In the same way, it's not enough to pray for your marriage, your job, new people at church, or anything else... you always need to do your part to the extent of your capacity (which should grow as time goes on, too).

After all, we have a motto from the Middle Ages that sums it up nicely. Latin for "Ora et labora." Or "Pray and work."

Then we are to confidently entrust everything beyond our capacity to the Lord God (Philippians 4:6-7). We are not to be anxious, but to bring our affairs to God, and He will give us peace in them. For example, a fine example for me right now is the health of my son, Joachim. In fact, it is an example of an area where I have limited capacity to address. And at the same time, the uncertainty of that future is what bothers me the most here. Because my capacity to protect him is limited. I can get him through the vaccinations. I can teach him not to put his fingers in the drawer, not to jump out the window. I can teach him to swim. I can take care of him in many ways. But I can't control when he gets a serious illness, or make sure he avoids all accidents. I must trust the Lord God with that.

In conclusion

Let's work to our capacity. Let us strive to increase our capacity. Let us think about the future, let us try to prepare ourselves as best we can for whatever may come. But let us also acknowledge that we cannot prepare for everything. And that there is much that we cannot but leave to the Lord God.

But at the same time, let us try to see life from the perspective of eternity, which will help us see the true magnitude of the individual "stakes" and how much they matter. And that what really matters in life is where we spend eternity. And that is the sure bet with Christ.