

This Sunday's texts:

Deuteronomy 6: 4-7

Galatians 2:19-20

Matthew 6:25-34

Kingdom of God
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The holy Gospel according to Saint Matthew, the sixth chapter:

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you - you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

The gospel of the Lord.

I began my call in September of 2020, which I do not recommend, if you are wondering about starting pastoral ministry in the middle of Covid. It's not high on the list of things that I think makes pastoral ministry easy. But to make my own journey even more interesting, I was right at the end of the Ordinary Season, leading into Advent as I began my call. So for about the first six to eight weeks that I was there, it was just apocalyptic reading, after apocalyptic reading, after apocalyptic reading in the Lectionary. Every Sunday, I got to walk into church and proclaim, with a smile upon my face, "Congratulations! It's the end of the world!" and considering the season of life we were all walking through, a season that was marked heavily by conflicts and by disease, these readings felt more relational for the congregation I was preaching to than ever before. And as a pastor, it was my joy to get to point out glad tidings in the news of Jesus Christ riding upon a cloud. And yes, it's true that none of us know the day or the hour, but we long for it, to get to take these texts that we view as frightening and proclaim them as good news, to tease the meaning out there.

And then I had a miracle, not in my personal life, but a text to preach on. This miraculous healing where we hear from the word of the Lord, "Go, your faith has made you well"¹ And I have never been more frightened to preach on a text in my life. I wanted to say, "Let's go back to the end of the world for a moment" because there's something about preaching to a group of people that is dealing with pain, dealing with loss and we have this proclamation from the Lord, who has given sight to the blind. "Go, your faith has made you well"² and I am preaching to the faithful, who have aches in their knees, whose eyesight is

¹ Unsure which she is referencing. It could be: Luke 17:19 (ten lepers), Mark 5:34 or Matthew 9:22 (bleeding woman), or Mark 10:52 (blind man)

² So probably, Mark 10:52

going, whose hearing isn't what it used to be. I had a moment where I asked myself how do I make this good news? Because confessionally and pastors aren't supposed to confess from the pulpit, but I'm not standing up there, so we're going to do it this morning. Confessionally for me, it's so much easier to take these texts that we have questions and confusion about and we're not sure why it's good news to us and to tease that out and help answer the riddle and the mystery of faith for the people that are gathering here and have questions.

But when we have texts, these miraculous healings, these exhortations not to worry, our response tends to be why not me? Why not me? I am faithful. Where is my healing? When we read this text in Matthew today which is beautiful, it's a text that I quote all the time – “consider the lilies of the field, [...] Solomon in all of his glory was not clothed as richly as these”³ It is also a text that frequently makes me want to argue with Jesus, to sit down with him and say “Lord, Messiah, Savior, I think you might be a little out of touch.” And *that* is conviction. That is conviction, when myself as a pastor, I recognize that desire to argue with God with this text. But I think part of the reason we find ourselves in this conviction and I know that you have a very good pastor who has been training you recently to consider not just the passage that you're looking at, but the full context of the scripture that it is situated in.

Matthew 6 is a fantastic chapter. This takes place right in the middle of the Sermon of the Mount. The Lord preaching on a mountaintop to people gathered there – all sorts of people. The poor and the wealthy alike have come to hear the words of this crazy preacher. They heard his cousin before. His cousin is now sitting in prison, so they don't have access to the camel hair, the locusts, and the honey quite like they used to. But this Jesus guy is doing something new. So they come and they listen to him. If you look in your pew Bibles, just so you know I'm not making this up. It's page 1380.⁴ It starts with a proclamation to give to the needy and as soon as I see that, I'm like maybe I shouldn't have called Jesus out of touch. Jesus is very aware that there are those amongst us who have needs not being met. Your community is aware of that. That's why you have a food pantry. That's why you look outward and seek ways to feed the community around you, hopefully not just physically. Because is not life more than bread?⁵ More than eating and drinking, but also spiritually and proclaiming the spiritual food, in the hope that exists there. Our Lord goes on, moving past giving to the needy, to prayer, exhorting the people around him to, yes, please pray to the Lord, pray to your father. If you don't know how, I will give you the words to do it. He hands us down a gift that has stayed with us from age to age, the Lord's Prayer, words we have when we have nothing of our own. Will the Lord not provide for you? Will the Lord not give to you? He talks to us about fasting, how to fast *faithfully*, to fast in a way that gives glory to God and allows us to experience faithful discipline in our own lives, rather than seeking glory for ourselves. And he asks us to store up treasures in heaven rather than treasures here.

If we listen to each of these small lessons, these small promises along the way, the promise that, yes, you have the poor with you now. You have the poor with you now, but you have me with you as well. In Christ, you find a promise that the hungry will not always be hungry, that the grieving will not always be weeping, that there is a new age coming and dawning for each of us, a promise that we celebrate not just on the Easter morning that took

³ Matthew 6:28-29

⁴ Matthew 6:1

⁵ Matthew 6:25b

place last week, but on this Easter morning as well, the promise that we worship a living God, a present God, a God that cannot be out of touch because this was a God that took upon flesh and was born in a manger and suffered every indignity of human life. This was a God that relied on his mother to change his diaper. This was a God that fished with his friends in the ocean and the sea, a God that probably stubbed his toe once or twice along the dusty streets of Jerusalem. This is a God that knows pain and a God that knows joy, a God that has witnessed and experienced poverty and has seen sometimes the callousness of wealth.

So when we are given this proclamation today that you do not worry about tomorrow because tomorrow will worry about itself, when we are given this proclamation today that the Lord will provide for us, it is not an invitation for me to take up the mantle of preachers that have come before me and packed the pews and give you the good promise of the Prosperity Gospel and promise that if you behave well, all good things will be given to you. You'll have that fancy sports car and that clothing that you want because we're going to try to outdress the lilies here. Even Solomon in all his glory did not receive that. What this is is a promise and a direction to look at the world around us and see where God has already provided for us.

When people ask me what my proof of the Gospel is I often direct them to look at trees. I know that seems silly and don't worry. I'm not about to get into creation worship here. We have these big beautiful plants that grow on the ground. They provide for us shade and something pretty to look at. They breathe out the air that we need to fill our lungs and they breathe in the air that we cannot use. Creation cries out with messages of God's love. Creation has written. We see the Lord's fingerprints in every part of it, in the birds of the air that have plenty to fill their bellies and the lilies of the ground that don't just make me sneeze, but provide me with something beautiful to look upon, that seem to shout out that the Lord is good.

Do not worry about tomorrow because tomorrow will worry for itself. In this proclamation, we are given a freedom because the reality is the thing that very often keeps us from acting on God's love in our life is fear about what that will bring for us. If I go to my neighbor and I tell my neighbor in sincerity and love that the Lord loves them. If I am willing to have that conversation with my co-workers, if I am willing to have that conversation when the Holy Spirit opens the door for me to have it. And you know what I'm talking about. You know those moments in your life where the Holy Spirit has opened up a pathway for you to have those conversations and you stepped away from it out of fear. What are you afraid of? What tomorrow will bring? That you may be a little less popular? What are we afraid of when we hesitate to give generously to our neighbor in need? When we hesitate to invite the outsider in? We are afraid of what tomorrow may bring, that we may not have enough, that somebody may think differently of us. If we are willing to step out and do exactly what the Lord has asked us to do earlier in this chapter, to care for the needy, to pray boldly to our father, to fast, to live lives of faith, not just here on Sunday morning, but every day in between, we're worried about what tomorrow will bring.

In this passage, the Lord isn't tsk-tsking us for having moments of anxiety and doubt and fear. This direction not to worry, this is the direction like a mother speaking to a child who is worried about what is under their bed, who is worried about that thing that doesn't matter or doesn't exist because these are the things that so often keep us from seeking the kingdom of God.

I have to ask you a question today. Do you believe that our Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead? Do you believe this? Do you, people of God, believe that our Lord Jesus Christ is coming back to judge the living and the dead? Do we believe this? Then what have we to fear? We have already been told what the kingdom of God looks like. That is a kingdom where the blind see once more, the ears of the deaf are unstopped, and the legs of the lame leap once more. That is the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is described as a place where the roads are paved with gold, where the hungry will weep no more, and where the proud have been cast down from their thrones. We have been told what the kingdom we seek looks like and that is the kingdom we anticipate. That is the kingdom we wait for, but that is the kingdom we have already seen. You saw it on Easter morning.

Getting a little controversial. Are you ready? Hold onto your hats. Let's do it. You are not citizens of the State of California or citizens of the United States of America. I'm freeing you of this this morning. You are citizens of the kingdom of God. We are given permission today act on that, to seek to build up first and foremost this kingdom that has been entrusted to us, to answer to our lord and savior, Jesus Christ, the King that will come again. When the Lord tells us not to worry today, the Lord is acknowledging that we will stumble along the way, that sometimes there are stumbling blocks in front of us that we don't cast aside as Paul directs us. We just run right over them and face-plant. That is Christian life. The Lord is acknowledging that we have anxiety about our day-to-day life. How am I going to get my kid there on time? How am I going to fill up my car full of gas? How am I going to make sure there's enough food on the table? How am I going to keep up with my neighbor? Some of those worries and anxieties can only be answered by the generosity of our neighbor for a time. But all of those worries and anxieties have already been answered by the generosity of our Lord, who has given us a foretaste of the feast to come, who is shown us what to anticipate, what to hope for in the kingdom of God, and has left us a promise that he did not leave us here alone, but sent to us an advocate, a guide, a director in the Holy Spirit and sent us a promise that when just two or more are gathered in his name, he is there with us also. We answer to a living God, a present God. We live our lives in the knowledge that it is his will, his kingdom that we anticipate and answer to and that is good news, to worship a generous, loving, forgiving God, not just on this day, but on every day to follow, and not just in this age, but in the age of ages, to be invited into an eternal life where we are clothed greater than the lilies, where our bellies are filled upon the bread of life, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Let us pray. Lord Jesus, we praise you for your wisdom, even in moments where we want to argue against it, even in moments where it convicts us. We praise you for the promises of your kingdom to come, the kingdom that we long for and seek, the kingdom that we are running after, with the knowledge that you have made us citizens, adopted us into your family and your kingdom, through your body and your blood and the waters of baptism. Lord, help us to seek you first and foremost, to find our comfort in your word and your promises, in the proclamation that you are present, that you were coming back, and that you are good. In your holy name, we pray. Amen.