

Sermon Message on Sunday, April 26, 2020

Based on Matthew 6: 25-34

Dear friends, dear church,

“Do not worry about your life,” Jesus says in today’s gospel. And a few verses later his mini-sermon concludes with, “Each day has enough trouble of its own.” Well, he’s not kidding! Each of these past days has had a little trouble, right? Trouble for small businesses trying to stay afloat, trouble for overwhelmed health care systems and emergency rooms, trouble for retailers and restaurant owners, trouble for young adults juggling family and job at home. Heck, trouble to buy toilet paper at one point... Do not worry? Easier said than done! How can you not worry if your job is at risk? How can you be calm if your future is becoming uncertain, or if you have a relative whose life is at risk and you can’t see him or her? These are worrisome times for many people; we can certainly say that.

So, while this message is heart-warming good advice during normal times, this is a time when it’s more like a challenge. For some people it may take serious effort to combat anxiety these days. Of course Jesus is still absolutely right, worry can’t add a single day to our lives or make a single day any better. We know this, and yet, our hearts and minds are wired to be anxious. I have talked to so many people over the last several weeks and while many of them are coping very well and are stoically cheerful in their quarantined homes, some are sincerely worried. One person even told me “I’m not sure I can ever go out again!” For anxious people these are not good times, and so this scripture verse from today’s gospel is more than just a piece of advice; this is a life-line. This is about the salvation of your soul, because anxiety is like a cancer that can take your peace of mind. So, Jesus is throwing us a life line and it’s up to us to grab it and hold on to it.

This is the lifeline: “Don’t allow yourselves to be consumed by worry about your life, your livelihood, your family, your health, your neighbor’s health, your children or what not...” And you say, “How can I not? These things are going through my mind, they keep me up at night...” And Jesus suggests that we actually have a certain say in this, we have “agency” as they say these days, we can avoid this pitfall... But how? Here is an idea: maybe return to the old habit of beginning each day with a prayer or a centering meditation and let go of that which most worries us, from the very time we wake up. And let your day begin with a simple prayer: “God, help me through this day!”

This past week, we celebrated the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day, which, ironically, was established out of worry about the health of our own planet. And we can see in this that worries are not all bad, they sometimes lead us to take action. But they can also send us into a tailspin of anxiety that has no positive outcome. And here is another suggestion that connects this text with Earth Day. Jesus encourages us to take a page from creation, from Mother Nature and our creature friends - some feathered, some furred, some living in our own homes, some singing in the trees. It is comforting, is it not, to observe the ancient rhythms of life, the awakening of spring, the beautiful colors produced naturally this time of year. Some people have researched this and have found that spending time outdoors has a calming influence on us. In one of those reports I read that it is even beneficial to have a nature scene on your computer screen. Even that has a calming effect on people they found. So, Jesus’ suggestion to look at creation is more than mumbo jumbo, it is really helpful, and I encourage you to take some time each day to be in the presence of God, in the presence of creation and allow yourself to be part of a much bigger reality. It may well put your own worries in perspective. May God bless you!

Amen.