

Scriptures used today: **Isaiah 49:8-16a**; **1 Corinthians 4:1-5**; **Matthew 6:24-34**

IN GOD WE TRUST

A man was seen fleeing down the hall of the hospital just before his operation. A security guard stopped him before he could leave the hospital and asked, "What's the matter?"

The man said, "I heard the nurse say, 'It's a very simple operation, don't worry, I'm sure it will be all right.'"

"She was just trying to comfort you," said the security guard. "What's so frightening about that?"

"She wasn't talking to me," exclaimed the man. "She was talking to the doctor!"

David Beckett, Hakuna Matata

Bobby McFerrin in 1988 wrote his iconic song, "Don't Worry, Be Happy" and every preacher from then till now has used it in some way when they read this passage of the gospel. I saw it on YouTube again this morning, and it's a little corny song that makes you smile. But is that what Jesus is trying to do here, make everyone happy? Is Jesus the forerunner of Mr. McFerrin saying, "Don't worry, be happy, God will take care of everything, just go sit down, there's no problems, turn your frown upside down"? Is that what you get when you read this passage? Its okay if you do, many people read "Don't worry, be happy" here. Many people think that Jesus does not have a solid grip on reality in this scripture passage.

Truth is...there are billions of people on this planet who are poor, they have no food, and they have no place to live, or have clean drinking water. There are many people in our community who live in the park, under bridges, or in tenements and ghettos with high crime, and people are always afraid to close their eyes at night. There are many people sitting in this church who are one paycheck away from joining these people who live in their cars. So how can Jesus say, "Don't worry about what you will eat, or drink, or what you shall wear"? How can Jesus say that God will take care of you, when there are so many people who have nothing? What makes us different from them? Is it faith? Is it our baptism? Somehow, because we are Christian that we are spared from worry and fear; that by repeating over and over that God will make everything all right in the end... that

is going to keep us in our homes? I have great difficulty with Jesus' words here if that is truly what he is saying. So what is Jesus really saying in the gospel of Matthew chapter 6? Well, let me tell you a story:

Once upon a time, there was a blacksmith who worked very hard at his trade. It came time for him to die and go to heaven. God sent an angel to get him. But he refused to go. He said, "My neighbors are now planting and sowing their crops, and I'm the only blacksmith in town. If something happens to their equipment, it'll need to be fixed, and if I'm not here to do it, they won't be able to get their crop in. So would you please leave me, so I can serve my neighbors?" The angel had never run into anybody that didn't want to go to heaven, but the angel pleaded the blacksmith's case with

God and God said, "OK."

Later the angel came again and said, "It's time for you to leave this life and enjoy God's eternal life." Again the blacksmith said, "One of our neighbors is very ill, and if we don't help him harvest his crop, his family will be destitute. Will you please leave me, so I can help him get that crop in?"

It became a habit. Every time the angel came, there was always something else for the blacksmith to do. Finally, after many years, he prayed to God, "I think I'm ready. Send your angel." The angel appeared at his bedside. The man said, "If you still want me, I'm ready for you to take me home with God." The angel laughed and said, "Where do you think you've been all these years?"

This story illustrates exactly what Jesus is saying in this passage of Matthew 6. If you go back to the first verse which Dafry read this morning, verse 24: "No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

Jesus ends this passage with these words: "But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today."

These two verses are the keys that unlock this whole scripture. Jesus *is not* saying "Don't worry, be happy", what Jesus *is saying* is that if you seek God, if you serve God, if you strive and run after God, you will realize that the kingdom of God is designed in a community where you are not alone, where money, food, wealth, toys, clothes, houses and cars are not the driving force of our lives anymore. What *is* in control of our lives are these two great

commandments: Love God and Love neighbor. As Christians, these are the words that define us...or at least should define us.

Sadly, the Church of Jesus Christ is caught up in striving after wealth instead of God. Since the Roman Empire became Christian, the Church has been always striving after wealth and not the Kingdom of God. Of course, there have been wonderful saints of God who have demonstrated loving God and neighbor with their whole lives...and they are the true church...but the people who get into power in the Church seem to block out God and run after the money.

What I'm trying to say is that putting "In God We Trust" on our money is not enough, that saying we are Christian is not enough, that putting crosses on buildings does not make it a church. The Church of Jesus Christ is made up of all

those who strive after the Kingdom of God, who seek righteousness in all things, where loving God and neighbor is the driving force of their life...anything else that claims to be the Church is a lie.

On the other hand, the Church is made of people who are sinners, who see the problems of this life coming and so they close themselves off from God and others as they try to overcome their problems on their own. This is our natural inclination as people, batten down the hatches, and put up the fortress walls. But Jesus in this passage of scripture is trying to blow all of that up. He says that when troubles come your way, and they will, don't run into the fortress of your own strength but cry out to God in prayer and run into the arms of the community of God, and find the resources and the strength you need to see you through today...just

today...don't worry about tomorrow, today has enough troubles of its own. And above all else...give thanks.

The late Roman Catholic priest and prolific writer on the spiritual life, Henri Nouwen, felt God call him from his faculty position at an Ivy League University to live with the poor in South America. In his book, "Gracias!" he writes:

"In many of the families I visited, nothing was certain, nothing was secure, MAYBE there would be food tomorrow. MAYBE there would be no sickness tomorrow.

Maybe...maybe not. But whatever came to these people, they still greeted life with joy and with "Gracias!" What I presumed from God as my rightful claim, my friends in Peru and Bolivia received as a precious gift. What I treated as common place was for them a joyful surprise. What I

trivialized as ordinary, they celebrated with reverence and said, "Gracias!" And slowly I realized what I had all but forgotten and dismissed. All is grace. All is God's gift!

This is the lesson we can learn from those people who receive life as the sparrow or the flower of the field, that they trust God even in the midst of hard work, when there is nothing to show for it, yet still they say "Gracias!" God is good, all the time, all the time, God is good.

How can you enter that life of joy, where all that you receive is a gift of God's grace and nothing of your own doing...you are here...just say thank you God, I will continue to trust in you, here is all I am and all I have...use me for what you will, help me to love my neighbor and to love you today.

Amen.