

Thoughts for Thanksgiving Sunday – 2017 Matthew 6: 25-33

You know, I really had trouble putting this sermon together this week—so many false starts and stops, having a thought, going on a tangent with one idea, another would pop into mind, and I'd try again. You'd think a Harvest Thanksgiving celebrations would be easy for a preacher who lives on a farm, wouldn't you?

Please don't misunderstand, it's not that I'm not thankful! That's not it at all. God's amazing grace overwhelms me sometimes, I feel well and truly blessed. But, it's been a busy and emotional few weeks for me of late, and then with all that's been going on in the larger world—the LA massacre, so many people ravaged by the storms and earthquakes, threats of nuclear missiles. I'm at one of those stages right now, where I'm trying to process it all. And when I start thinking about it all, in context of thanksgiving, I guess you could say my cup was running over with thoughts. So what I'd like to do is share some of these with you, today. Because I suspect you've had times like this too, when your mind overwhelms you. And looking for God in the midst of it all helps to ground us in God's presence in the middle of the emotions. Because, as I heard also this week from a very learned person: God is always present to us, but we're not always present to God!

When I look at the news south of the border, I thank God I live in Canada! It truly is a country that is such a great place to live. It's not that Canada is not immune to violent acts, natural or man-made—we too have our zealots and mentally unstable people, but the Las Vegas shooting is beyond anything I can comprehend—it's beyond my ability to understand the desire and need for some people to have to own guns, and how that can become part of a country's law and so engrained into their psyche that the need to have a gun overwhelms the reality of the violence that way of thinking causes. And then in the midst of the violence, the stories of so many responding so compassionately to the victims—even while they themselves are being shot at or have been wounded, or putting themselves at risk to help another. And as I was watching that, I knew-- that is God in the midst of the evil, the violence and pain that mankind causes itself.

And this week, the tragic death of my friend and colleague Pastor Chad Honneyman. It's so sad, for so many, especially his wife and his parents, and of course his parishioners, his colleagues, his friends. It's such a loss. He impacted so many lives, he was a good man, a young man with so much more life to live—that makes it harder to accept, intensifies the sorrow. So, the fragility of life caught me too this week, especially on the week after I did a funeral for a man who had taken his own life. The preciousness of life, and how we take it for granted, and that we take our relationships with people for granted too sometimes, to the degree that we don't really appreciate it fully, until it's gone. So I give thanks for having known Chad, and give thanks for his life and I know he's now with God. And pray for his wife and family. This also gives me deeper thankfulness for others in my life that I care about, and strengthens my internal resolve to remember to not take these relationships for granted either, to appreciate them to the fullest and to not let all the other stuff that can keep me too busy if I let it, get in the way of the people. And the realization that there are so many others that I don't share enough of God's love with, to whom I need to be more present.

Some other thoughts that are working through my brain this week. The gorgeous weather this fall, the amazing beauty and bounty of the harvest, and watching the harvest of beans and corn, apples and pumpkins, squash and potatoes as I have driven around the countryside this week, while listening to news stories about starving refugees walking miles and miles to leave their homes, because they're being killed for their religious beliefs. And in our amazing land of bounty, news stories about how we need to start composting our food waste—not because it's the right thing to do, but because food is clogging up land fill sites, and we're going to run out of place to put all the food and garbage! We have so much in this country that the bounty overflows into the garbage. There is something wrong here! Yet, we continue to be inundated with advertising to get, to keep purchasing more and more and more, and it's even easier than ever with on-line shopping. Not only we are what we eat, but we are what we buy. This consumerism has led to our value as people

being tied up in our ability to purchase and accumulate. And this too gets into our psyches, so much so that we judge each other on these values—and ourselves with these same so-called values. Our sense of self and of others is based on money, and it is the dominating focus of our lives. And this can literally make us unwell, this constant anxiety our society feeds us with, this feeling that it's never enough, it's never good enough, so we're never good enough either. Depression and anxiety are at record numbers, and starts when our kids are pre-teens!

Tuesday I was at a clergy training day with Archbishop Colin Johnson talking about adaptive leadership for these challenging new times for the church, and it was a very good workshop. We began with some stats about rural depopulation and urban migration and immigration trends and the impact of these on the Anglican church at large, and how many people still consider themselves Christian—and Anglican on their census forms, we will need to and can adapt and change to this new reality of today's world. And it occurred to me that in the midst of these changing times, that the 'old' reality, of course, continues to be with us, that God is always with us, Jesus never stops loving us or forgiving us and the Spirit continues to empower us, when we are open to the Spirit's touch.

And then to top it off, I read the gospel reading for today, "Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life." The 'do not worry' reading. Right. Not only does God have a sense of humour, but this week in particular, a sense of irony too. Just what I wanted to preach on. Ok, so here goes. When you don't know where to start, a definition is a good place. So what is worry, what does it mean to worry? The dictionary definition: "(t)o feel or experience concern or anxiety; to fret: mental distress or agitation resulting from concern usually for something impending or anticipated; anxiety."¹ The opposite of worry? Unconcern²

Really Jesus, 'don't worry about your life'? It feels like sometimes the world's going to hell in a hand basket! Be 'unconcerned'?! But, you know, life in Jesus' time was pretty violent. The people he walked around with and preached to didn't live in a bed of roses either. So, there's a bigger message here, besides "don't worry, be happy"! It's a matter of focus, what is at the centre of our lives? What is it that guides how we live, work, play? Jesus really isn't suggesting we abdicate all responsibility for our lives. We all have days when we wish we could just walk away from all and let someone else deal with it. But in our hearts, we all know that not only is that not realistic, and won't make our lives better, or make us better disciples of Christ. And the "don't worry, be happy" ethos most certainly not the example Jesus gave us.

What Jesus **does** tell his disciples is that God will provide, whether we worry about it or not. After all, if God cares for the birds and the fields, will our Loving Creator not care for the ones created in the Creator's own image, oh -- we of little faith? Yes, of course, that is what Jesus tells us over and over in scripture. God provides and provides abundantly! That is what thanksgiving and harvest festivals are about, a reminder that all we have does come from God, as much as we'd like to think that it's all about us and how hard we work and deserve all we can buy. I recall the old benediction we used to sing, back in the day: 'All things come of thee O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee.' We can only give back to God what God has given us in the first place.

Do not worry, Jesus says four times in these few verses. There are things you don't need to be anxious about, don't need to be the focus of your lives, because God provides for our needs; that's what 'do not worry about your food and clothing' means. So, where is the focus of your life, what really is important? What dominates your thoughts, what are the guiding principles in your life? Jesus tells us quite clearly, verse 33: 'Seek first for the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and God will give you everything you need.'

¹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/worry> accessed October 2.17

² <https://www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/worry>

So today, especially, in the midst of the beauty and abundance, the pain and the mess of our lives, with give thanks to God, for all God has given us—including God’s own Son to love us. And our thoughts are with those in our corner of the world, and also in the larger world indeed that have lost so much, and are hurting. Our prayers for comfort and strength go to them. We give thanks for this wonderful Anglican Church Community where we are worshiping today, and all of us in it, and ask God to help us, for the Holy Spirit to empowers us to discover ways to share the joy of our faith with others, to bring others to the joyful and forgiving love of God in Christ.

And we give thanks to God for the incredible bounty of our lives, that all we have comes from God and is God’s and our job is to share what we have with others, as bountifully and God has shared his creation with us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

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