



SUNDAY SERMON

Our Human Family is a Delicate Fabric

Let us pray. God of life and God of love, behold this, your family:
Nourish us with your Word, bless us with your grace, fill us with your love. Amen.

To those gathered round him, Jesus says, "do not worry." In quite a few instances, Jesus says, do not worry, do not be anxious; fear not. He says it a lot. Do not worry about what you will wear, or what you will eat. Do not worry about your life. Worry will not add to your length of days. Wise counsel, surely, but easier said than done. Worry is high on the list of things many of us are doing these days. I know I am.

I believe there is something in Jesus' words we need to hear. As we enter this strange new time, I want to share a few ways of seeing our lives through the lens of Jesus' teaching and God's love.

So, because it's Lent, I've spent some extra time in prayer with Jesus' spending forty days in the wilderness, tempted by Satan. If you recall, each of the temptations - to turn stone into bread, leap from a pinnacle, rule the cities of the world - each is an appeal for Jesus to use his divine power. Satan says, 'c'mon Jesus; you've got the juice; you can fix this, you can make things right.' And right about now I'm thinking, 'c'mon Jesus, you can fix this situation we're in.' And since you're not doing so - (in a way that I can discern), then I'll get on it. I'm going to fix this, and fix that, and save this, and save that. I'm going to take care of my family, and my congregation, and myself, and everyone everywhere who has some sort of need. And I can't. I can try. I can exhaust myself. I can fret and worry. But I cannot save myself, I cannot save you, I cannot save the ones I love most, or anyone else. And this, my friends, is poverty. Poverty of spirit. As in, when Jesus teaches, blessed are the poor in spirit, for they shall receive the kingdom of heaven.

Why blessed that we cannot save ourselves? Paradoxical as it may seem, this is really good news. Because to accept that we cannot save ourselves is the first step toward truly putting our faith in God, the first step toward accepting that it is grace alone that will save us. Anyone familiar with AA or the twelve steps knows this truth. Satan wanted Jesus to use his divine powers because Satan wants us all to believe we can supplant God. And in that hour, Jesus chose not his divinity, but his humanity and his poverty. Jesus put his faith and trust in God alone. I have found some real relief through my morning prayer and evening prayer to whisper aloud in the chamber of my heart, "I am not able to save myself, or anyone else. God, you alone, shall save us." Just saying it gives me freedom to let go. Accepting my own smallness and frailty in the storm lightens the weight, which, I have found, frees me during the day - to notice a little bit more, to pay attention, to care, to laugh, to reach out, with compassion.

I'm not saying we shouldn't do all in our power to care for one another. Of course we should - and we want to, and do. I'm just acknowledging that there's only so much we can do and if we can be aware - even a little - of being carried and held in God's grace we are free to do what we do with a little more love.

Continued

ST. COLUMBA'S
EPISCOPAL CHURCH

DATE

Lent IV

Sunday, Mar. 22, 2020

PREACHER

The Rev. Ledlie Laughlin

VERSE

Matthew 6:25-34

I am not saying this as a rosy gloss as if to say it's all okay. It's not okay. A friend of mine wrote, "while I appreciate the many people I have seen making the best of physical distancing and staying at home, I can't seem to find that silver lining. Apart from the fact that it's necessary for the health of the world, it's hard to feel anything but lonely. The distance is important, vital even, but it isn't easy and it isn't really going to be nice, and you don't have to pretend that it will be."

Even in health, family members are cut off from one another; we are cut off from one another. Or some are forced into really difficult closeness, feeling trapped. Especially in the poorest parts of the world, we're surely at the beginning of a tragic wave. Canceled graduations, postponed weddings, closed businesses, shattered dreams, and lost lives. My heart is with my daughter, her husband, as she is due to give birth tomorrow - or any day. They live in Brooklyn, and just want to have the baby and get home safely to their apartment. Every single one of us all around the globe is being affected by this.

Wise Franciscan Richard Rohr reminds us, "there are only two major paths by which the human soul comes to God: the path of great love, and the one of great suffering. Both finally come down to great suffering—because if we love anything greatly, we will eventually suffer for it. When we're young, God hides this from us. We think it won't have to be true for us. But to love anything in depth and over the long term, we eventually must suffer."

With the onset of this virus, you and I are already witness to great fear and loss. And if we have not already done so, we are going to witness great suffering. If we are spared the suffering in our own homes, we will experience it in our communities through the news from around the world.

Ironic that our forced separation and physical distancing is the means for us to realize our essential relatedness. What the environmental climate crisis has not yet taught us, this pandemic has made clear: we are a single family.

Two weeks ago most of us were busy with our own lives and agendas. Today our own lives and agendas have been turned upside down, but we're aware in a way we could not have imagined that - in the Apostle Paul's words - when one part of the body rejoices, the whole body rejoices and when one part of the body suffers, we all suffer together. A delicate tapestry of our life in God's love.

With enforced physical distance, we're discovering new ways to be together. I am in awe of the little stories popping up everywhere. Just within St. Columba's the Flower Guild cannot arrange flowers and the ushers have no one to greet at the doors, but each of those groups are weaving new online connections with one another. Last Sunday, some 60% of the youth in YAC (young adults) spontaneously found one another through their GroupMe app and shared their weekly ritual of thorns and roses. Monday meditation now meets via telephone and is open to all. The Mother's Group meets daily, the Father's Group has a Zoom gathering tonight. And if you're hearing my words, feeling not connected, and want to engage in some new way, find us at columb.org or email us at pastoral@columba.org

To those gathered round him, Jesus says, "do not worry." This is not a holy panacea or make-believe. This is Jesus' deepest reassurance that, come what may, we are already eternally held in God's love. We are already able to see the heart-wrenchingly delicate fabric of our human family. Do not worry. Reach out in love - as you are able - one to another.

This would be a very good day to go with your friend, or give them a call, and together, look at the birds of the air; look at them. They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Consider the lilies of the field - and the daffodils and tulips, and magnolias and cherry too, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. Do not worry. God knows all that you need. God knows all that is within your heart in this hour. Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Amen.

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