

Pentecost 2

May 28, 2008

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"Therefore I tell you," said Jesus, "do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink or about your body what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Indeed your heavenly Father knows you need these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and these things will be given to you as well."

I am not surprised that Jesus encourages us to redirect our focus by directing our attention to nature as he warns us against undue anxiety. Contemplation of nature can be a reliable remedy for worries that paralyze us or plague us. It happens in our backyard when I watch the sparrows dart about or the goldfinches fighting over who gets to be on the feeder. I can forget the concerns that beset me when I observe the beauty of a rolling landscape while we are hiking or the changing seasonal colors as we bike along the Heritage Rail Trail. Nature discloses to us something of the one who caused it all to be and reminds us that what we need is provided in the creation. When Jesus points us towards the birds of the air or the lilies of the field, he is not just trying to get our minds off our worries, he is pointing us to a way of seeing the larger purposes of God for all of creation.

Yet, I think, it is easy to misunderstand what Jesus is saying. We are tempted to dismiss these examples thinking birds and flowers are carefree because they do not know what is in store for them. As a bumper sticker says, "If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs - you clearly do not understand the situation." I believe that Jesus points us to birds and lilies because they participate in the life God poured forth in all creation without a self awareness that restricts them from being what they are intended to be.

Worry and undue self awareness blocks our ability to participate fully in the joy and wonder of life that is God's gift. Worry often causes us to feel disconnected from God and from each other. All of nature has lessons to teach us about being unobstructed channels for God's love and grace that we are all created to be.

You and I need to hear and absorb the lessons read today. Readings from Scripture that remind us, God has big plans for us. Paul writes that we are meant to be "stewards of the mysteries of God." Stewards, that is quite a responsibility.

What kind of stewards are we meant to be?

Kenneth Landall told a story that spoke to me about the stewardship that is my responsibility as a Christian and as a child of God.

There once was a woman who longed for peace in the world and peace in her own heart. The world seemed to be falling apart and her personal life was not all that great either. She was worried and frustrated. It seemed that every day was more stressful than the day before.

One day while shopping in the local mall she walked into one of the stores. As you can imagine, she was quite surprised to see Jesus behind the counter. She knew it was Jesus because he looked just like all the pictures of Jesus she had seen in devotional books and picture Bibles she used in Sunday School. Not sure what to say she finally asked, "Excuse me, are you Jesus?"

"Yes, I am." Jesus replied.

"Do you work here?" she asked.

Jesus smiled at her, "Well, in a way, I own the store."

A bit surprised but curious she asked, "What do you sell here?"

"Just about everything," Jesus answered her. "Feel free to walk up and down the aisles and see what you would like. Make a list and bring it back to me. I'll do what I can to help you."

The woman did just that. She walked up and down the aisles making a list. There was peace on earth, no more war, no more hunger, a cure for cancer, no more poverty. There was harmony in families, no more drugs, the wise use of the earth's resources. By time the woman returned to the counter her list was long.

Jesus looked over her list and said, "Good list, no problem."

Bending down behind the counter Jesus began to pick through all sorts of bags and boxes. Finally he stood up and placed packet after packet on the counter. Not sure what to make of these packets the woman said, "What are these?"

"Seed packets," said Jesus. "This is a seed store."

"A seed store," the woman blurted out, "You mean I don't get what I want. I am looking for the finished product. I am not looking something to do."

"No," Jesus said, "this is a place for dreams. You come here and see what could be and then I give you the seeds. You go home, plant the seeds, water them, and nurture them, help them to grow and some day you will enjoy the benefits."

"Oh," said the woman and left without buying anything.

Jesus invites us to live, to think, to act in a different way. Jesus' way is one of being in harmony with God, with others and with the creation. Jesus' way invites us to go against the grain, march to the beat of a different drummer or however you may wish to phrase it. Jesus' way has to do with how we invest our lives.

It appears to me that today what matters is whether we can afford to send our children to the college of their choice. In the current economy what matters most is whether we have a job that really does pay all the bills. In our homes what matters is that we have a way to get everyone where they need to go - soccer practice, band rehearsal, the mall, to a friend's house or a parent's home. What matters in the church, well all too often, what matters is how many people are sitting in the pews and how much money they put in the collection plate.

In a sense Jesus is correct, for most middle class Americans we don't have to worry about food, clothing or health. Clearly there is plenty else to worry about. Perhaps what we need to hear from Jesus today is we are worrying about the wrong things.

As my father would say to his children, we have our wants and needs confused. We worry about keeping our jobs because the job provides security rather than an opportunity to use abilities that give our lives meaning. We worry about getting family members somewhere when we should be concerned about finding time to be together. We worry about people when we don't see them in church rather than creating a space where they feel so welcomed they do not want to stay away from sharing in the church community. As we worry about these things we get further and further from the very things that bind us together: family, friends, a sense of purpose.

Suppose we could stop worrying about these things and allow our faith to grow like lilies of the field. Suppose we could stop thinking we are in charge and listen to God speaking a word of guidance and grace. Suppose we could stop trying to hold on so

tightly to what we have and allow God to surprise us with what can be. Suppose we take each new day as a gift full of opportunity. That is the invitation of Jesus when he said, "Consider the birds of the air..... consider the lilies of the field."

Having faith is a lifelong journey of allowing God into our lives. It is planting seeds, watering them, nourishing them and waiting for them to grow. The world around us needs seeds - seeds of peace, seeds of prayer, seeds of hope. God has given each one of us the potential to do mighty things for we are the stewards of God's love, grace and peace in our world. Jesus gives us the seeds. It is our responsibility to take the seed home, plant it, nurture it and help it grow. That is how the world is changed for the better one seed, one faithful follower at a time.

Are you willing to be a planter?