

FEBRUARY 27, 2011

Scripture: Hebrew Bible: Psalm 131

Epistle: I Corinthians 4: 1-5

Gospel: Matthew 6: 24-34

MEDITATION: DON'T WORRY!

Don't Worry? That seems like a rather naïve thing to say at this particular time in our world reality. How can we not worry as we look around at all the chaos and destruction in our world? Every time, I see a massive earthquake happening somewhere in the world, I worry about my family who live on the west coast, right on the fault line. I have heard the predictions that it is not a matter of IF but rather of WHEN there will be a massive earthquake there. And so I worry! It doesn't change anything, but I do worry.

I remember a time when I was having a conversation with my father. He was "worrying" about some matter with his children. I don't remember exactly what it was, but he was quite upset and I said to him, "Dad, don't worry, it will be alright." He got a little upset and said, "Don't tell me not to worry. If your names were Milly Schwab or Walter Crumb, I wouldn't worry but there not so I worry. Of course, I will worry, you are my children." He then "tongue in cheek" said he had a solution, he was going to go to his good friend and neighbour and ask HIM to worry about us instead! That way he could stop worrying himself! I laughed of course, and the conversation turned in a different direction. Nothing changed for my Dad; he still worries about the well being of those he loves.

In times of desperation, the human heart does seem to turn naturally to worry and to seeking some kind of meaning to the devastation that they see in their own lives or in the world's experience. The people of the Middle East are in desperate times. Especially in Libya, they are up against a terrible and formidable foe. It seems that their "mad man" leader will not relent. He will use any amount of power and terror to keep his place of privilege and oppression. It breaks our hearts, as we watch helplessly, as ordinary citizens throw rocks and stones at machine guns. The situation seems hopeless, and indeed many well meaning people, looking only for some degree of fairness, in their lives, loose their lives by the thousands. What can they do up against a "mad man" who will not see that his way of being in the world can not go on. It appears that they can do nothing else, but what they are doing. They have to trust that their actions will bring about a fundamental change in their lives, and in how their governments work. The cost is great, and their worries must be astronomical as they carry on in the face of this seemingly impossible battle with a tyrant. They worry but they keep on.

Jesus tells us that he has a solution to our WORRY. JUST DON'T WORRY. Seek the kingdom of God, seek righteousness and all these things that worry us will be resolved. Well that's easier said than done! In our world of REALITY, we quickly respond that that message makes little sense. We need to worry and work toward the well being of our own, ensuring enough of our resources will go first to that before we even CONSIDER,

the needs and wants of others. We would be so much more comfortable if Jesus said that was OK. But He DID NOT. He said “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.” (Mt 6; 33 -34) Much of the time when Jesus talks about money in Matthew’s Gospel he also talks about the kingdom of God. Don’t worry about yourself. Ignore your needs and strive for the reign of God. What is the realm of God? Where is it? How do we find there? How do we get there? Why would we want to go there?

The kingdom of God comes to us in our own daily lives. It comes to us every time we bless each other with love and kindness and understanding, including those who mourn, those who weep, those who are our enemies, those who are confused, and those who need encouragement. Whenever we bless another or are blessed ourselves with love and kindness and understanding the realm of God comes among us. Every time, we give of our resources to help those who need food or shelter or clothing, God’s reign is with us. Every time and place we speak out on behalf of those in need of shelter, of safety, of a living wage, of health care, of educational opportunities, or of welcome, the reign of God comes. Every time and place we bless others by taking a stand with those who need our support, the reign of God comes. When we come to the aid of those who cannot get their needs met because of mental illness, a language barrier, a lack of knowledge, a physical disability, a lifestyle, a skin color, and their age – or more simply, every time we stand with those who need our support because no one sees them, no one hears their cries for help – every time we take a stand for justice and peace for all people, the reign of God comes among us. It’s that simple and it’s that difficult. Jesus is speaking to us from that mountain top, urging us to climb up what seems to be the impossibly steep grade and find that realm of God. But we are human, and Jesus knows that as well. That is why he asks us to strive and why he assures us that we are “held in the palm of God’s hand.” Jesus knows that we will resist the climb, that some days we will be too tired and too afraid, or too preoccupied to seek and receive the blessing that leads us to the top. The good news is that on those days when we just don’t have the strength it takes to climb and even on those days when we do, someone is there to lift us up, to come down to our level where we stand and lift us up, give us strength to keep going higher.

Paul knew all of this at a deep level when he spoke to the church in Corinth. He knew they were struggling with all manner of their “humanness”. His message to them is relative to us in our own congregation. The people of Corinth were asking Paul what they needed to do to be an effective congregation. His reply was two things, last week he told them they need to be unified and this week he is telling them they need to be accountable. Our congregation like theirs is made up of so many differences. Different ages, genders, gifts, experiences, and mostly different opinions. About nearly everything. If we need a semblance of unity in order to allow our differences to bring us together, that unity is enhanced by our willingness to be accountable. Accountable to whom? Obviously to God. Paul tells them, and us, that we must be good servants and good stewards. Willing to give of our selves, and our own wishes for the greater good. Along with our call to follow Jesus comes the gift of a community to belong to, and this community will not be able to function without our willingness to not only be accountable to God but also to be

accountable to each other. Our accountability to each other is two fold, we must both give and receive. That's hard for us in our time, when the norm is to be independent. That works until we are faced with our first earth-shaking crisis. Often that first crisis is so unmanageable that we are tempted to flee from those who care for us. We are so stunned by our need that we are unwilling to admit it. We are more easily prepared to suffer alone than we are able to ask for a listening ear, prayers, or help with daily needs. But our accountability to each other is a mutual thing. Accountability within the Body of Christ is a gift given to us when we have heard Jesus' call. It is the gift of not being alone while following Jesus. Consider the near impossibility of being a solitary disciple of our Lord and Saviour. Paul is telling us that if we are to have unity and accountability we must speak to each other, listen to each other, help each other, and seek to understand each other. These are dangerous times, times in which we might be given over to worry about our future and worry about our path ahead. Jesus tells us DON'T WORRY, work as hard as you can to be a part of God's vision for a justice and caring world. Keep together, call each other to account and call each other to love. DON'T waste your time on the future, work hard today, love each other, and seek to understand each other as you work. Turn your love outward to the world and just watch what God can do with his fallible human creature. May it be so! AMEN