

Reflection for Thanksgiving Sunday, October 7, 2018

Based on Matthew 6: 25-34

For the people at Trinity United, Vernon, BC

Offered by: the Rev. Liz Bowyer

Thanksgiving Sunday is always one of my favourites in the church calendar year as we gather to give thanks and praise for the harvest.

It's one of my favourite days as we begin to notice the cooler mornings and longer nights and all this in the midst of reveling in the brilliant hues of the autumnal colours.

Thanksgiving Sunday is one of my favourites because it brings back so many memories from my childhood when I attended South Burnaby United Church with my best friend from elementary school and sang in the church choir.

Thanksgiving Sunday also one of my favourites because, no matter what, I like the scripture readings on offer.

This year, our reading comes to us from the tail end of the sixth chapter of Matthew's gospel, also one of my personal favourites.

Here at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus provides his followers with an antidote to anxiety.

"Do not worry about tomorrow" he tells those first followers, "for tomorrow will bring worries of its own."

"Today 's trouble is enough for today." * he tells them.

You see, as an eldest child and a worrier by nature, these words attributed to Jesus according to the gospel of Matthew are words I need to hear.

They are words that give me permission to let go and let God.

Maybe that's the case for you as well.

Because of my inclination to worry, I deeply appreciate this morning's invitation from Jesus to put a deliberate pause on our inclination to worry.

For me, it feels just right as we join together to bear witness to and give God thanks and praise for the blessing and the challenge of being the church at Thanksgiving.

But even more than the invitation not to worry, I take heart in the encouragement behind Jesus' invitation to take that deliberate pause.

Here in the verses Alma Jean read for us, Jesus reminds all who have ears to hear, eyes to see, hearts to feel, minds to think, voices to speak, and hands to share, Jesus reminds us of the vastness of God's all-encompassing love, both for humanity and for all of the cosmos.

Here, Jesus reminds us that God will meet our every need—from food to clothing to well-being.

"...do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear."* he tells them.

Comparing his listeners first to the birds of the air and then to the lilies of the field, Jesus makes us this promise: If we can free ourselves up from the worries of mundane things, we will begin to be able to focus on our true function, our real goal.

Our true function?

Our real goal?

And what might that be?

Here in Matthew's gospel, Jesus reminds us that our work as followers in the Way is to be builders of God's kingdom, God's vision of Shalom, God's dream for a world where the last shall be first, the weak shall be strong, and the hungry shall be fed.

This kingdom-building endeavor, this striving to be in life giving relationship with God and with one another and all we encounter is hard to understand and yet harder still to embrace.

Jesus speaks of the building of God's kingdom at length in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew's gospel.**

But for today, his word for us in this last portion of the Sermon on the Mount follows on from an earlier warning to remember that we are called to serve God and not wealth.***

A first step to heeding that warning, that admonition that we cannot serve both God and wealth, is to step back and observe.

That first step is to be mindful that though we are called to be in the world, as followers in the Way of Jesus, we are also called to be something else quite different.

This morning Jesus calls us to be observers of nature and to have faith and trust in a God who loves more than we might ever ask or imagine.

And so it is this morning, I invite you to take that deliberate pause seriously, to rest into the good news on offer, and to know that our God can and does provide for all our needs.

As we revel and rest in the beauty of this space, may these familiar words from the 23rd Psalm help us to embrace this truth:

“The Lord’s my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me to lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside still waters;

He restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake.” ****

Thanks be to God and may it be so! Amen.

The impetus for this sermon comes from a variety of sources as follows:

*Matthew 6: 25-34, The Holy Bible, NSRV, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 6-7

**Ibid; Matthew 13: 1-53, p. 14-15

***Ibid, Matthew 13, verse 24, p. 14

**** Psalm 23, Ibid, p. 553

*****A sermon by the Rev.Susan Sparks found at

[www. Day 1.org/7157-jesus_and_dr_seuss_a_conversation_on_worry/comments](http://www.Day1.org/7157-jesus_and_dr_seuss_a_conversation_on_worry/comments)