

Thanksgiving Sunday, October 11, 2020 Matthew 6:25-34 LFLC

Can't believe I am going to begin this Thanksgiving sermon
by saying that Donald Trump and Jesus have something in common
when it comes to telling us what they think about
how we are to deal with the truth about tomorrow because
both of them say, either directly or indirectly, "Don't be afraid!"

One version of that is said by a self-serving narcissist
who doesn't give a damn about other people
getting sick or dying from a virus. . .
while the other is said by one came to serve and to save others
by giving his life for others.

"Don't be afraid" is essentially the meaning of Jesus' words in today's text,
especially verse 34: "Do not worry. . .about tomorrow,
for tomorrow will bring worries enough of its own"

Or, as Eugene Peterson puts it so plainly:
³⁴ "Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now,
and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow.
God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes."

Now, having introduced my sermon this morning in that way,
please. . .please. . .be aware that neither Jesus nor I
are singing the same song from Trump's hymnbook
because neither Jesus nor I are saying or implying
that we can be uncaring idiots when it comes to thinking about
or planning for tomorrow.

I mean, without a doubt, we need to be responsible rather than irresponsible,
and to behave responsibly rather than irresponsibly . .
and yet. . .and here's the rub. . .and yet we to be and to act responsibly
without deluding ourselves that our decisions and actions we take today
will enable us to determine or shape what happens to us or others tomorrow.

Jesus is pretty clear about this truth:
That we are not in control of tomorrow,
and not only of tomorrow but even of today.

Oh, we can do our best to do everything right. . .
 to take or make every provision possible. . .
 in preparing for what could happen tomorrow,
 but we are all old enough, experienced enough and wise enough
 to know that everything can still go sideways today

Over 50 years, numerous funerals for numerous sudden/unexpected deaths
 Dad (heart attack)/Mum (a stroke) /daughter killed by drunk driver;
 son from an inadvertent drug overdose; baby stillborn. . .
 or “baby is going to die today”. . .tiny coffin in dad’s arms.
 “None of them ever saw it coming. . .”

Events like that remind us we are not in control of very much at all. . .
 BUT THE ILLUSION THAT WE ARE OR CAN BE OR SHOULD BE
 leads us to worrying and being afraid of what “might be”

Movie: *Shawshank Redemption* – “Fear makes us a prisoner; hope can set us free”

Now, hope is not day-dreaming or idle wishing (win lottery).
 Rather hope is a conviction or, better, a stance that we take in life
 that is based on past realities/actions

We can hope—that is, be confident—that God WILL take care of us
 because God HAS taken care of us;
 We can hope--that is, depend on and rely on--the truth
 that God IS present with us and WILL continue to be present with us
 because God has been with us all the way along—
 whether we knew/believed/saw or experienced it

So “don’t be afraid,” says Jesus.
 “Don’t worry about what might/will happen tomorrow.
 Let the worries of tomorrow be tomorrow’s and live for today.
 God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.”

A few days short of one year ago, we gathered here in this place
 for the Memorial Service of Rick Kiel (long-time member/sudden stroke)
 In my sermon said: All of us really only have two guarantees
 to hold on to as we journey through this life--
 and the first guarantee is today.

I went on to say then and will say once again now:

Maybe you don't think that that today is very special or extraordinary.

But, you know, in the entire history of the world,
there has never been another day like this one--

and in all the eons still to come, there will never be another exactly like it again.

To be honest, if we were aware of just how precious this day is. . .

and how quickly and easily it can be taken from us,
we could scarcely live through it.

But unless we become aware of how precious it is,
we can scarcely be said to be living at all.

We need to learn to see today . . .this day. . .for what it is:

a day full of grace. . .a day full of love and beauty and goodness. . .
a day given to us by God as a free and undeserved gift.

Therefore, if there are any words of apology or forgiveness
that need to be said to someone, say them today.

And if there are any gestures of love or reconciliation
that need to be made to someone—

whether an estranged family member or a former friend,
make them today.

Learn to forgive and forget what is past,

and don't be too concerned or anxious about what lies ahead.

After all, both yesterday and tomorrow are out of our control.

All we have in our hands is today.

So, let us bless it by living it to its fullest and its best

by recognizing what a gift today is. . .

and what gift it is to us to realize that and remember that

Church Sign: “Give thanks you are live today”

(not enuf room for “don’t worry about tomorrow”).

And I know that’s not easy to do. . .at least it isn’t easy for me.

It takes a lot of work for me to stop focusing on tomorrow.

Long time ago now, asked my DAD – “think about dying? Too busy living!”

Didn’t understand what he meant. He was about my age now (75)

and I was 35. . .and bullet-proof.

In addition, I have been, and in many ways, still am one of those people
 who can't wait to see what's around the corner. . .
 what new and shiny thing or idea or plan might be coming next.

But I am learning. . .or trying to awaken to the fact. . .that he was right—
 that focusing too much on the future—
 on what might happen or what could happen—good or bad--
 steals the joy and sucks the life out of the present moment
 and leads us to miss the wonder and promise of today.

I also want and need to say that while it isn't always easy for me
 to believe and to follow Jesus' words of caution about tomorrow,
 it is even harder for me to speak about this to you—
 to you who are listening whether here or at home
 and who might. . .or do. . .hear Jesus' words "Do not worry. . ."
 as utter nonsense, ridiculous, even "Trumpian". . .
 especially these days when fear of and worry about the virus is everywhere.

But I am trying as best as I can to hold on to. . .rely on. . .the truth of his words—
 which means that for me—at least to my way of thinking--
 I don't want to "die before I die". . .that is, "shrivel up and die inside"
 by being a prisoner to fear or to worry about tomorrow.
 Instead, I want to "live until I die"—to live NOW. . .
 and to live, not fearfully or anxiously, timidly or hesitantly, but fully—
 that is, thankfully and hopefully—literally, full of thanks and hope—

the hope that comes from Second Guarantee we have in this life--
 which is the sign of the cross. . .the sign which proclaims clearly
 and tells us plainly that God is with us/God suffers with us/
 God loves us and cares for us. . .that God is FOR us.
 And, as Paul says in Romans,
 "If God is for us, who (or what) can be against us?"

Now, please be assured that that claim of Paul's
 is not just a nice-sounding theological affirmation
 but is a conviction and confession which stands
 at the very core, the very heart of our faith. . .and our life.

For you see, to place our trust in God's promise
to be with us always and everywhere
allows us, not so much to trust in the future
as to trust in the one who holds the future. . .and who holds us

So, to wrap this up:

If you are able and willing to take just one thing from what I have said
on this Sunday of Thanksgiving. . .on this day. . .today, let it be this:

Don't worry. . .at least don't worry too much. . .about tomorrow.

Let God take care of tomorrow. . .and let God take care of you.

And instead, give thanks to God today
that you are alive today. . .today. . .
that you are alive today.

And let all God's people say (or whisper) "Amen!"

Amen.

SDG