



Pentecost 11 – Year C – 2010
Text: Luke 12:32-40

Homily given at St. John's Cobble Hill ~ Sunday August 8th 2010

Using resources from April Berends and Richard Rohr

*O Eternal, Radiant God:
Place our minds before the mirror of your eternity;
place our souls in the brilliance of your glory;
place our hearts in your divine life that we may live always
in the presence of your being;
in the name of the risen Christ. Amen.*

(source: St. Clare of Assisi, 13th c.)

There is a line in one of my favourite U2 songs called *Stuck in a Moment* that says:

*"I am not afraid of anything in this world,
There's nothing you can throw at me that I haven't already heard."*

Every time I listen to that line from this song, I think "Wow! I wish I could really say that with the same amount of confidence as Bono sings it. But sometimes (as we all know) things are scary in this world and there are, in fact, many things that cause us to be afraid.

"Do not be afraid, little flock." Fear not. We heard these words today and we have heard these words before in Luke's gospel. They are the words that the angel Gabriel speaks to the aged Zechariah, when he announces that a son will be born to him and his wife Elizabeth – they, who had waited so long for a child. "Fear not." These are the words spoken to a trembling teenage girl by the angel Gabriel who brings the message that she will carry Jesus in her womb. They are the words spoken by the angel of the Lord in the shepherds' field, "Do not be afraid...I bring you good news of great joy for all the people." They are the words that Jesus uses to summon his first disciples after they haul in a boatful of fish. Peter, James and John promptly leave their nets and follow him. These are the words that herald miraculous births, joyful news, and calls to loving action. Oh, and by the way, these were also words given to me last Wednesday on the day I turned fifty by countless well wishers who said: "Fear not, Scott. Yes, you're now 'over





the hill’, but life actually does get better on the downward slope... (It just goes a lot faster)”. I think I will need to rely on a lot of faith to believe them. But it was good advice, nonetheless because for some of us, it is scary when the day arrives when we cross the great divide of mid-life! Be not afraid. Fear not. Words given to us by our loved ones in whatever anxious moments we may find ourselves in and words uttered by angels and spoken by Jesus in today’s gospel.

So why does Jesus use them now in this particular part of the gospel? Well, perhaps it is because the news that he is about to proclaim will no doubt raise some anxiety. His message is not easy. Just as the words of angels cause those in their presence to tremble, so too, does the cost of following him – of being one of his disciples.

Jesus goes on in this gospel to instruct his followers. Sell your possessions, he says, and give alms. Strive for the eternal, not for the things of earth which do not endure. This is hard news for a group of Christians in the first century, many of whom probably struggled just to get by. The radical message that we find in Luke’s gospel—a vision of a new reign of God where the powerful are cast down and the lowly lifted up—likely did not have much appeal among the upper classes of society. It was fearsome news indeed, that the order of things, our structures of power, would be turned on their heads.

It’s clear from the number of times Jesus mentions financial wealth in the gospels that money is an important subject to him. Like any good leader, he understands that power is closely tied to financial gain, at least earthly power is. It’s also tied to personal well-being, but not always in the ways that we might think.

We toil to make money; we worry about spending it; we worry about keeping it. Will it grow enough so that I can retire and still have something to leave for my children? Will we ever pay off the mortgage? Can I afford to take that vacation? Am I making the right investments? Am I being paid what I’m worth? Is the price on that litre of milk correct? Did it really go up that much? It’s my kid’s birthday this week—will I be able to work enough overtime this week to pay for that new bike? It’s easy to spend a lot of time and





effort accumulating and worrying about possessions. And it's easy to let our possessions possess us. I know. I struggle with this all the time!

Jesus reframes the issue, though. "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is God's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." In other words, all that is worth having, (really worth having) God has already given, and gladly so. It brings God joy to share with us the eternal reign of heaven. And that should be our starting point. Treasure that!, Jesus says.

But Luke's message is not just about living forever in the presence of God. It is about who God is and how we should live as God's people. God is generous, has given us all that we need -- the promise of joy and wholeness, forever -- and we have a role in that promise.

Jesus tells us to be dressed for action, like servants waiting for our master to return from a wedding banquet, listening for the knock at the door so that we can welcome him home. The promise is set before us, but we don't just sit back and accept the gift. The gift must be received with our lives. When God called Abraham and Sarah, as recounted in today's passage from Hebrews, the Promised Land wasn't just dropped in their laps. No, God called them to pick up everything and embark on a journey. They never lived to see the Promised Land, but that promise shaped their lives. And they entertained angels along the way.

Be dressed for action, Jesus says, ready to receive the Christ, who may come knocking in the middle of the night.

The parable that Jesus tells takes a strange and wonderful turn at this point, when the servants who have stayed awake to greet their master open the door to find themselves the guests at his own table. "He will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them" today's gospel tells us. Jesus sets forth a generous model of how we are to live, where the one who is powerful sets the table, and makes those who have nothing, his honoured guests. This is the realm of God that can break in.....and it





can change the world! But it is the opposite of how many in our world view power, success and achievement.

You see, the gospel of Luke tells us of a reign that involves a new economic order, a way of being community that is grounded in generosity. Jesus calls us, by word and example, to loosen our grip on those things which possess us so that we might freely serve. He calls us to set our lives in order, to replace fear and anxiety with faith, and to be ready for God's reign breaking in all around us.

How do we do this? First and foremost we must consider what we hold dear. Is it our possessions? our cars, our jewellery, our food, our entertainment, our homes? Or is it our relationships with God and with our neighbours and this fragile earth? When we think of what we have, do we acknowledge that it comes from the hand of God? Or do we pat ourselves on the back for having obtained it? Do we cling tightly, or do we give freely?

The simplest rule of thumb for each of us is to ask "Where do we spend our time and where do we spend our money?" That's where our treasure is, we can be sure. The focus of your time and money will tell you what your God is and what is important in your life. As others have wisely said, your chequebook and your calendar reveal your true belief system.

The great German mystic of the 14th century, Meister Eckhart, said: "There where clinging to things ends, is where God begins."

We live in a country where an average fountain in a tourist district contains enough money to feed a family in a developing country for months, and yet we still have the poor in our midst. Right here in the Cowichan Valley and in the capital region of Victoria, and all across this country (one of the wealthiest nations on the planet) we still see homelessness, extreme poverty, organized crime, employers failing to pay workers a living wage, and aboriginal Canadians being seven times more likely to be the victims of violent crime. South of the border things of course are equally bad where, as I recently





read, young men are putting bullets in the heads of boys who grew up on the same block over drug money.

The reign of God can break in, will break in, does break in, even to a world such as this. God calls us to be a part of this restoration by relaxing our grip on those things which possess us, and using our resources and our talents to reframe the structures of society, that we might usher in the fullness of God's reign here on earth.

That's why the call is to faith, to believe. Such faith is the opposite of anxiety. Without such faith we are going to be concerned only with management and security questions: How will I survive tomorrow? Will I have enough? How can I keep what I have? Jesus is not calling us to be afraid. Rather he is warning us about missing life. He is saying, "It's all right here and now. Live in the moment and don't let life just float you along. Choose life each moment. Insofar as you let God's reign happen, you will experience it. That's the promise.

When the great civil rights leader, Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke of the "promised land" in that famous "I've been to the mountaintop" speech*, he was not just referring to a distant future, he was also speaking of the bus riders in Montgomery, the sanitation workers in Memphis, the jails in Birmingham, (all the civil rights issues of his day) and all places in the world where God's people live oppressed. "It's alright to talk about 'streets flowing with milk and honey,'" he said "but God has commanded us to be concerned about the slums down here and (God's) children who can't eat three square meals a day."

The faith that is shared by Abraham and Sarah, by those first disciples of Jesus, by the little flock of Christians to whom Luke's gospel speaks, is a faith that calls us to be dressed for action, speaking out on the issues of our day. It is a faith that calls us to be

* *Martin Luther King, Jr. "I've been to the mountaintop." Speech delivered April 3, 1968 in Memphis, TN.*





politically active, fiscally generous, and compassionate in every area of our life as we journey together toward the Promised Land. Christ calls us to respond gratefully, with love that risks, love that gives, love that answers, love that never stops hoping for the beauty of heaven, and never stops seeking to show that beauty here on earth.

Rev. Scott Pittendrigh

