

Proper 14, Year C
Luke 12: 32 – 40
August 11, 2019

Dear God, may
We live in a world of fear. Here are a few statements.

- “We have an invasion of illegal immigrants who are streaming across our borders. It’s critical that we stop the invasion.”
- “If the Affordable Health Care Act is removed thousands of Americans will die in the streets.
- “Homeless people are all drug addicts and alcoholics.”

I just shared a three “fear” statements and the general context should sound quite familiar. There is much to fear today: terrorism, war, the economy, global warming, unemployment, hunger, homelessness and the homeless people who might come to live in your neighborhood, disease, and death. Fear leads to tribalism which today seems to be rising to new levels.

Fear is in the air and it’s surging. The September 2, 2016 issue of The Atlantic Monthly states that Americans are more afraid today than they have been in a long time: Polls show majorities of Americans worry about being victims of terrorism, crime, global warming, the power of the other tribe. Fear pervades Americans’ lives—and American politics. Fear also pervades the media. Feel good stories and stories of love just don’t sell in the media world. Sadly, the fear in our society resulted last weekend in two tragic shootings – one in El Paso that was focused on racism and hate and in Dayton probably similar but like El Paso, senseless and tragic. Do you remember there was also a mass shooting in Gilmore, California, on Monday, July 29th, four people were killed, including the shooter, and at least 12 people were injured? Bishop Rickel states we are actually becoming numb to these shootings.

It helps me to understand the mass shootings last weekend in Dayton and El Paso and Bishop Rickel’s comments that “gasoline was thrown on the fire by the racism and hate that is so prevalent in our society. He continues, you cannot call our Nation great, or compassionate, or peaceful, or safe without taking action. Unless your concern is your personal wealth and the stability of the stock market, things are not looking very great right now. And so, it’s thoughts and prayers all over again. The prayers are not for God, the prayers are for us.

Today’s Gospel reading begins with “Do not be afraid little flock...” In other words, it begins with fear. Unlike the news media or the politicians Jesus is offering options other than vote for me or watch my media channel.

As the Gospel reading continues Jesus says, "...for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. First you must Sell your possessions and give alms."

Are you kidding me? We just shared many of the fears in our world and you want me to sell all my stuff and then give the money to the poor? Now I'm afraid. What will happen to me?

If you had to give up your possessions, which would be the hardest to give up and why?

What would you do if you won the lottery? Keep all of the money? Give it away? How much would you give away?

I learned you can't sell pianos – in fact you can't even give them away. They're too heavy, too large for many homes, and nobody wants them. Think about the china and glassware you inherited from your Great Aunt Sarah. You want to give the china and glassware to your children, and they don't want them. A member of Men's Group shared this frustration and I thought, "Wow. Our children don't want our stuff either." A short time later I read an article in the that confirmed my fears. Young people do not want their parents' treasures.

What relevance does this have to our Gospel lesson for today? Jesus is saying "Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Last week Rev Diane *shared our cultural mind-set about aspiring to the good life, an important facet of which is acquiring more. It is hard to persuade people to share, when they are focused on seeking more for themselves. We have a tendency to measure our lives by what we do not have. At the heart of our thinking is a fear of scarcity and so our aspirations gravitate toward seeking abundance.* I walked through Old Town last week and conducted an informal open garage door survey. Three of the four garage doors were filled with "stuff". The fourth garage, a single car garage actually was filled with a car. Don't fear. The Red Door should continue to receive donations from garages.

It's important to share these thoughts because this week and last week the Gospel readings have been about money and possessions. Jesus has more to say about money than almost any other topic. Yet 2,000 years later we are facing the same challenges over money and possessions. Jesus does not condemn all possessions. "Your Father knows you need (food, drink, and clothes). But He strongly warns against putting faith in money. Money (and I use the terms possession and money as synonyms) can be reduced to three questions.

1. How did you get it? Did it involve injustice, cheating or oppression of the poor?)
2. What are you doing with it? (Hoarding it? Exploiting others? Wasting it on needless luxuries?)

3. What is it doing to you?

Although Jesus speaks to all three questions the last one is the most important. Possessions operate much like an idol. It can catch hold of and dominate your life, diverting attention from God. Jesus challenges us to break free from power of your possessions, to include giving them away.

In the first reading from Isaiah it's quite clear that God is not happy with us. "Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom. Listen to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah." God is saying there is a disconnect between praising God while desecrating God's command to love. The particular wickedness of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah was a matter of greed and injustice. Ezekiel 16 states "Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy." God is clearly saying NO.

What does God really want? God is asking you to put your heart with your treasures. When you place your heart with your treasures you're placing God first. You're freeing yourself of the worship of money, things, and idolatry. You're extending God's faithfulness to the entirety of God's creation. Jesus is asking you to seek your "treasure in the Kingdom of God." When lack of fear precedes our fear driven desires for possessions, we might actually be able to imagine treasures beyond self-driven determination, self-assessed success, and self-obsessed security.

In order to that you must have faith. In the second reading from Hebrews it states, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." It refers to Abraham and the faith he displayed in God when he was asked to begin a journey and he didn't know where he was going. It seems like you would need a lot of faith in God in order to that. That's what God and Jesus are asking you. Put your treasure in the Kingdom of God.

How do you do that?

First, I'm not proposing you give all of your money away and I feel like I'm "preaching to the choir". I've observed your generosity with the Red Door. You enable those have possessions to give to those who don't. The results are that people are able to buy nice "things" for a very low price. Those items you cannot sell are taken to other agencies and either sold or given to needy people in third world country. Items that be neither given away or sold are recycled. Finally, the profits you make are returned to the community. In 2018, you gave over \$46,000 to the needs of the community and set aside additional money for grants.

Besides giving to the poor, ensuring your possessions and money aren't idols that you worship, and treating others with love, I would like to share some thoughts of Richard Rohr, a Catholic priest, from his book, The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality

Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe. Don't focus on "who you are" but simply that YOU ARE. God loves all things by becoming them. We, Muslims, Christians, and Jews, believe that God created all things. If you believe this is true than "where do you see God?" I see and hear God in the birds that are talking in the morning, in the trees that have been here longer than us, in the love God has for all of us when I see the squirrels, chipmunks, and deer. I know is that God is present and wants the best for us when I walk through my "sacred" place, Washington Park, or, according to a health care provider do "Forest Bathing" which means simply spending time in nature. When I Forest Bathe, I feel God's love for all of us and that puts the fear and possessions into perspective. In addition, your stress is reduced, your energy and focus are increased, and you feel more connected to others

I share this because the Gospel for today tells us to "be prepared" and that "You must also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour." Being ready for Jesus is less about a time and place and more about imagining Jesus' activity in the world, when and where you least expect it. If you let Christ into your heart He is already here. You are doing what Jesus would do if He were here today. You are sharing your love of Christ.

And so, it's thoughts and prayers all over again. The prayers are not for God, the prayers are for us.

- What will you do?
- Where do you see God?
- Have you opened your heart to Christ?
- Has the Son of Man arrived at the unexpected hour for you?

AMEN