

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

May 24/25, 2008

Matthew 6:24-34

“What ... Me Worry?”

A parable. One day as a man was spending his lunch break in the park he noticed “death” walking by. He was dressed in black and had a big sickle in his hand and he was headed toward downtown. The man jumped up from the bench he was sitting on and walked up to him. “Hey, whatcha doing?” he said. “I’m on a mission,” “death” replied. “I’m here to take 100 people.” “Why that’s terrible,” said the man, “why are you going to do that?” “That’s my job,” “death” said. “That’s what I do.” Leaving the man behind, “death” hurried on to find his 100 people. The man, though, was no dummy. He wasn’t about to let his family and friends be numbered among the 100. So he whipped out his cell phone and started making calls, warning everyone he knew to watch out for this black-clad figure with a sickle in his hand and to give him a wide berth. He made call after call. All day he sat there on that park bench calling people, trying to warn them about “death’s” plan. Later that night, as evening fell, he met death again, this time heading out of town. “You told me you were going to take 100 people,” the man said. “But I just heard on the radio that 10,000 people died in town today. Why did you do that?” “Oh, it wasn’t me,” “death” responded. “I’m a man of my word. I only took 100 people. Worry took the rest.”

Our text for this meditation is the appointed Gospel lesson for this Second Sunday after Pentecost, Matthew 6:24-34, especially the last two verses where we hear Jesus saying to us, “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious (that is, don’t worry) about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” May God bless the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

When I was growing up I used to read Mad magazine. I guess its humor suited my own or maybe it formed it, I’m not sure. It’s “cover boy” was Alfred E. Newman and his motto was “What ... me worry?” And frankly when I was growing up I didn’t have much to worry about. My parents took pretty good care of me. In fact, they provided me with about everything that I needed – oh, maybe not everything that I wanted, but certainly everything that I needed. But, of course, I worried anyway.

Some years later there was a Bobby Ferrin song entitled, “Don’t Worry ... Be Happy!” but because I was on my own and didn’t have my parents to take care of me I worried despite his command not to.

And now, in today’s Gospel lesson, we hear Jesus saying, “Don’t worry” and, if you’re like me, you worry all the more because you worry. After all, we’re Christians and we know we shouldn’t worry, should we? But let’s face it, there seems to be a lot to worry about these days – take the war in Iraq and Afghanistan or the war on terror or the

mortgage meltdown or the credit crisis or the sad state of the economy or the loss of jobs or the high price of gas, not to mention the suffering, the tragedies, the illness and the death that we see all around us in the world and even in our own lives. And we worry anyway.

“Don’t worry,” Jesus says. And we say, “How can we not worry?” Well, Jesus gives us the answer – God will take care of you and, in that, free you to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” But we can only seek that kingdom and his righteousness because God has first sought and found us and made us members of his kingdom and gave us the righteousness of Christ in the bargain. He did it all in the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ. That’s why Jesus came into this world and that’s why he laid down his life on the cross – to seek and find each one of us – to make us members of the kingdom of God and to exchange his righteousness for ours. It was in our baptism that God claimed us to be His own and made us members of his Kingdom. It was in our baptism that we were clothed in the righteousness of Christ. And it was in our baptism that we were given faith.

It’s now in that faith that we are called to seek first that kingdom and that righteousness – to focus on our relationship with God in Christ as the number one priority in our lives. “You can’t serve two masters,” Jesus said. “Either you will love the one and hate the other or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You can’t serve God and money.” I like the old King James translation better – “you can’t serve God and Mammon.” You see, “mammon” implies more than just money, it implies, as Webster says, “the false god of riches and avarice, riches regarded as an object of worship and greedy pursuit, wealth personified.”

It’s not that we don’t need the things that money can provide, we do. And God knows that we do. It’s that we shouldn’t give those things first place in our lives. First place is reserved for God’s kingdom and his righteousness. And when we give God’s kingdom and his righteousness first place in our lives, He promises that all that we need will be given to us as well – maybe not all that we want but certainly all that we need. Look at how God takes care of the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, Jesus says. And if God takes care of them, won’t he also take care of you since you’re of more value than they?

Corrie ten Boom once wrote, “When the train goes through a tunnel and the world gets dark, do you jump out? Of course not. You sit still and trust the engineer to get you through.”

In the end, life is a matter of trust. Whom will we trust – God or Mammon? Jesus says that if we trust in God we don’t need to worry. But if we trust in Mammon worry is just the beginning of our troubles. May we cast our cares upon Him today who cares for us. In Jesus’ name. Amen.