



ST. STEPHEN'S
ANGLICAN CHURCH
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Trinity 15
September 9, 2018

**✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen.**

The passage selected for the Sermon is taken from the Gospel:

“O ye of little faith. Be not anxious, saying what shall we eat or what shall we drink, or whither shall we be clothed. For after all these things do the Gentiles seek. Your heavenly Father knoweth ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first His Kingdom, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.”

I was watching the news as I first worked on this sermon a few years back, and was touched by the story of a Christian Syrian family, parents and little girl, who had walked across Turkey and Hungary as refugees, seeking a better life for the child. They encountered the police in Hungary, who were rounding up refugees for camps, and they had heard some of the camps were rough. The reporter captured their conversation about whether to run or get on the police bus. They decided quite rationally the best course was the bus. As little as they had, as uncertain as their life was, as they made that decision, they had no fear, no anxiety. They were doing the best they could for their daughter, and the outcome was in the hands of God. As I watched the report, I was surprised that my reaction was not indignation or even sadness. I looked at the family and I felt the peace that sustained them, a familiar peace, one that passes understanding.

While my childhood was nothing like this little Syrian girl's life, the trust she had in her parents and in God were familiar. We had a big family. My dad worked two jobs or three and scrambled for side work when he could. When he finally got a management job, he worked 10 or 12 hours a day to keep it. My Mom took in sewing. We were on scholarship at the local Catholic

school. My sister Annie and I, as the oldest, were clothed with hand me downs from cousins, and the younger siblings got hand me downs from us. Help from grandparents to pay bills was common, and we were often blessed by the kindness of merchants that forgot to charge for the 6th and 7th kid's pair of shoes or let my parents buy school clothes on special terms.

Despite all that, we never would have considered ourselves to be poor. In fact, we knew that we weren't poor, because we were raised as a family of givers. Of whatever we had, we gave. Our hand me downs found cousins when brothers and sisters ran out. My Dad was always bringing me to help do work at the grandparents or grand aunts homes because we had the strength and youth to do work they couldn't do. When the nuns set out a bank or a penny collection for the poor kids in Africa, we were able to contribute, to do our part to share the bounty that God has bestowed on us here in America. We had little, but we weren't afraid we wouldn't have enough. We had more than enough, we had enough faith and love around us that we could share.

The Scriptures we are blessed to read are really timeless. They speak to the insecurity of our personal lives today. Those of us that are older are afraid we won't have enough for what should be golden years. We are concerned that our children are having difficulty establishing careers in an uncertain economy. We worry about our health, and the health of those we love. We worry about our mortality.

It is important and even honest to acknowledge that we are afraid. The times are frightening. But it is unhealthy, physically, emotionally and spiritually to be ruled by worry and anxiety. The anxiety of our generation is a temptation, a siren's call to paralysis and self pity, when the response of a Christian to the uncertainty of our lives must be courage, faith and

charity. How we embody the Scriptures is by living with that peace that allows us to be givers, even we are afraid the little we have won't be enough. That generosity is the new Circumcision that St Paul talks about in the Epistle. Hopefulness and generosity are the outward signs of God's chosen people to this uncertain world.

During a time of famine and drought brought onto Israel by their idolatry, the prophet Elisha was led to the house of a Shunamite woman. The woman was preparing the last of the grain she had for a final meal with her child before they would starve to death. Elisha asked her for a little cake from that last meal, and though it was the last bit of food between her and starvation for herself and her child, she shared it with the prophet. Elisha stayed with her and in reward for her kindness and charity, the jar of meal she had was miraculously filled every day for the duration of the drought. Her actions are the ideal we are called to imitate.

The Syrian family, fleeing a murderous regime that targeted even children, is a familiar historical event. Two thousand years ago Mary and Joseph were refugees to Egypt, fleeing a similar murderous tyrant, trusting in the Word of God that despite their hardship, they would be blessed to preserve the life of their child.

When Jesus was confronted with no way to feed the thousands that had followed him into the wilderness, when his disciples begged him to send the people away hungry, it was the generosity of a little boy, offering his few loaves and fishes to feed a multitude, that was the gift upon which the miraculous feeding was realized. It is our nature to react like the disciples, but it is our calling to imitate the charity of the little boy.

There is no doubt the devil is busy in this world, and that his goal is to whither our peace and our faith with fears and anxieties. We need to know that is his plan and we need to understand why the devil bothers with our material well being, and why the way we respond to the devil matters to God. The belief that what we own, what we have, can be our defense against the uncertainties and trials of the world is rooted in the devil's favorite temptation, pride. We are told that by amassing wealth, by accumulating stuff, we will fortify ourselves against the terrors of the world, against hunger, against illness, against loneliness.

But the great irony of that pride is that we can never amass enough stuff to put our minds at ease. We can always imagine some catastrophe that will gobble up our reserve, whither our wherewithal, leave us vulnerable

and weak and lonely. That fear makes us self centered, it makes us miserly, it forces us to be obsessed with accumulating more and more in an effort to battle our fear that we might never have enough. We become, self centered and greedy. Because we do not give, because we do not share what we have been blessed to have, what we keep in greed and fear is no longer a blessing. It loses the ability to bestow either joy or peace.

The success of the devil in making us anxious for our stuff opens the door to greater fear, the fear that we won't have enough health, enough life. The prospect of finding that a life time of acquisition won't protect us from aging, from weakening, from dying makes us miserly with our living. We isolate ourselves from the world and from each other to keep from being contaminated and infected. We fill our time with concern for being healthy at the expense of having a life. We lose track of the understanding that we have this life because it is the door to the next life, and so we fear death, trying to save ourselves from the inevitable transformation that we were born to experience.

Which leads us to the final achievement of the Devil's fear and doubt. More than dying, we fear being alone. We fear it in this life, but only as a reflection of the fear we have that death is the ultimate loneliness, that there is nothing for us beyond this life, that promises of Scripture and the experience of God in our lives and our relationships are empty promises. This is the point of the devil, to weaken our resolve, to betray our faith, the knowledge that we were made to learn love here so that we would be able to live in love forever. The devil wins if we are consumed by fear at the moment that we should be transcendent in faith and love. His victory is despair.

As our Savior has taught us in His Word and by His Life, we cannot save our lives. We can only give them. We are only blessed by the gifts we share, and never by the wealth we hoard. That peace comes from faith in God's love for us. That we will live forever, if we only give our lives to each other in love, the way that Jesus gave His life for us.

“Your heavenly Father knoweth ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first His Kingdom, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.”

Be not anxious. Be at peace and live in love.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.