

An Abundance of Blessings (Don't Worry; Be Happy)

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Rev. David C. Huffman

Mt. 6:25-34

Several years ago one of network news programs did a human interest story on a homeless man in a small town in Maryland, who walked around town all day and said to everyone he met, "Don't worry about it!" That's all he said, "Don't worry about it." Not "hello" or "have a good day" or "glad to see you," but "Don't worry about it." Now, I am sure that this greeting confused some and perplexed others, but I hope that it actually relieved some, lowering their stress level. I must confess that when I am in a fix and well meaning people tell me not to worry about it, I feel like saying "that's easy for you to say."

Elaine and I saw a National Geographic special this week on how stress can speed up the aging process and shave years off your life. A baboon study in East Africa has discovered that a Baboon troupe who accidentally lost their aggressive males has become a much calmer and healthier troupe, and his has lasted for twenty years. Jesus knew how unhealthy stress was for our bodies and our souls.

I

That is why in our New Testament lesson today he told his disciples not to worry. "Do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or drink or wear." I am sure many of us would like to say to Jesus, "that's easy for you to say." We've got bills to pay! We are living in the most anxious economic times since the Great Depression. People are losing their jobs, their houses, and retirement income. The stock market makes the Terminator Roller Coaster ride at Bush Gardens look like the tea cup ride at Disney World. It's difficult not to be anxious and worry these days; we've got a lot to worry about.

But Jesus makes the simple point that if the creator of the universe takes care of the birds of the air and the flowers of the field, who neither sow nor reap, then God is surely going to provide the things we human beings need, who are far higher on the food chain than birds and flowers. I don't think Jesus is suggesting we all quit our jobs and sit at home in front of the TV waiting for God to deliver our meals and clothing by Fed Ex. What he is saying, I believe, is that if we put God first in our lives, then all the material things that we want and need are going to fall into place. That takes a lot of faith, doesn't it? It sure does. He starts this passage by

reminding us that we can't ride two horses at once. We can't serve two masters. We must choose to serve God or mammon. And mammon, we all know, is the Hebrew word for riches or wealth.

I have always thought it *ironic* that we put *In God We Trust* on our money. When you consider the way most people in America live, it is not hard to tell who their God is. Jesus is asking us to get our priorities straight. He knew the seductive power of money over us, and he knew that God had told Moses and the people of Israel long ago, "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; you shall have no other gods before me."

Jesus knew that God created us as both physical and spiritual creatures, but that the most important part is the soul, not the body. He knew that what brings us the peace and joy we all seek is our relationship with God and one another, not physical comforts. We all need to eat, and wear clothes, and have a roof over our heads, but at the end of the day those things do not bring us happiness and spiritual wellbeing, because they *cannot*. That comes from God and God alone. And since Jesus knew this better than anyone else on earth, he was heaven-bent on passing this truth onto his followers.

II

You and are truly blessed to live in America, the richest nation on earth that by law allows us more personal freedoms than any other nation. But if our prosperity and freedom become impediments to a healthy spiritual life, then we are to be pitied. Maybe that is why Jesus spoke about the dangers of wealth more than any other single subject in his ministry; he knew that it easily crowds God out of the picture and hoists itself upon the altar of worship and adoration, where only God belongs.

Jesus came to reveal to everyone that God invites us to live in a whole new world; where there is trust and security and abundance. Ironically, banks are called institutions of *trust* and stocks in corporations are called *securities*. These terms have become rather hollow as of late. How many of you are feeling trust toward Lehmann Brothers, Bear Stearns or Wachovia? The stock market has lost 40% of its value and the housing market has lost 30% of its value in the last 12 months. How *secure* does that make you feel?

We need to invest our heart and soul in God, not in these other things. We need to worry about our spiritual life, not material things. Tom Long said that in God's Kingdom, we know

that tomorrow may bring trouble, but it will also bring God (*Matthew*, Westminster Bible Companion, WJK Pres, 1997, p.76). That's why they named the baby Jesus *Emmanuel*, which means God is with us. And if God is with us God will provide what we need, even if it is only the strength and the courage to persevere in our suffering.

Jesus said that worry and anxiety cannot add a single inch to our lives. In fact, it does the opposite; it can create ulcers, stress, and high blood pressure. The great secret of Christianity, one we all know but are reluctant to believe or accept is that those who put God first in their lives will find that in due time all those other things we worry about will be added to us. In other words, the really important stuff of life is our relationship with God and one another. The other stuff – food, clothing, housing, etc – though important and needful, is not *ultimate*. It does not define who we are, nor does it bring the happiness and peace we all seek.

III

Friends, a grand funk hangs over America today. Our gods have let us down. We have trusted in General Motors and Wall Street, and they have failed us. I am puzzled and perplexed that people are not flooding to church for relief and for guidance. Let us pray that they do. And when they come through our doors, may they find people who love God and one another and give thanks everyday for the rich spiritual blessings we have received. Let them find people who look at a glass of water, half filled with water and say it is half full, and not half empty.

Let me close with a story I ran across this week. A kid was playing around with a ball and bat in his back yard. He asked his father to watch him. He threw the ball into the air and swung the bat at it and missed. He picked up the ball and threw it into the air again, and swung at it and missed again. The third try he missed again. And he started cheering. His father asked him why he was so happy. He replied, "Because I'm really good at pitching."

Michael Josephson says, "You have to love Nick's attitude. He may not turn out to be a great hitter, but he's likely to lead a happy life. What's more, he'll probably bring warmth and cheer into the lives of others because attitude is contagious. Pessimists think people like Nick delude themselves by looking at the world through rose-colored glasses. Yet Nick's world is just as he sees it. His decision to view himself as a successful pitcher instead of a bad hitter will not only make him happier, it will contribute to his success." (Michael Josephson is the author and

founder of the Josephson Institute and its CHARACTER COUNTS! project. His web site is <http://josephsoninstitute.org>)

As you know, we began our stewardship season last Sunday. What a terrible time to begin a stewardship drive! But footballs are currently passing throughout the congregation with pledge cards in them. The Committee thought it would be helpful for everyone this year to take a look at what our money supports with a power point slide show. So, I am going to do something preachers are loathe to do: say Amen and quit talking.

We are now going to take a little walk down memory lane and retell the story of the ministry and mission God has blessed us with here at Trinity. So, bring the lights down and settle in for a 5 minute show of Trinity at work.