

22nd Sunday After Pentecost, October 12, 2008, Liturgical Year “A”

ST. BARTHOLOMEW’S CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY

The Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward, Jr. + Rector

Scripture: Mt. 6:24-34

“Timeless Wisdom for Troubled Times”

A NATION GRIPPED BY FEAR

What a week! You have seen the headlines: *“Stock Market plunges into a pit of despair,” “The worst week in the Stock Market since the Great Depression,” “US debt becomes too large for National Debt Clock,” “60% of Americans believe we are headed for a depression.”* And it goes on and on. Our economy is in trouble and everyone is trying to figure out what to do about it.

As a result, fear and anxiety have gripped the nation. Everyone is worried about the future. I took my car in for some basic maintenance the other day and the service manager was expressing his concerns. He has a six year old daughter and he told me that he is really worried about how things might be when she is older. I then was driven to church by the dealer’s van service and during the ride the driver and a retired woman seated in the front seat also shared their frustrations with the economy. Everywhere you go people are voicing their concerns and fears. And you can’t blame them.

What, however, should be our response as followers of the Lord? Should we be afraid? Should we be worried? Should we empty our bank accounts, stockpile food and gold, and lock our doors? What would God have us do? That is the question I would like to answer this morning. How should we deal with the economic and financial uncertainty we are facing?

DON’T WORRY

If we are to find the answers we need to go to God’s Word. And I would like to begin by looking at our second passage this morning, taken from **Philippians 4:4-11**.

St. Paul writes, *“Do not worry about anything...”* Notice nothing is outside the scope of Paul’s directive. Don’t worry about anything. Don’t do it. Don’t go down that road. The Greek there can also be translated, *“Be anxious for nothing...”*

And what goes hand and hand with worry and anxiety, fear. Now who operates in fear? Who is the sinister minister of fear? – Satan. **1 Peter 5:7** we are told that *the devil goes around like a prowling lion seeking someone to devour*.

Satan wants people to be afraid. He wants us to worry because fear and worry can do three things to us. It can immobilize you so you don’t do anything about anything. It can cause you to run away from the problem rather than face it head on. And fear and worry can even cause you to be self-destructive – it can cause one to commit suicide and even take others lives like the man in Los Angeles this past week who gunned down his family and then took his own life due to the market woes.

God does not operate in this kind of fear. In fact **2 Tim. 1:7** boldly declares that *“God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.* Isn’t it interesting that Paul also talks about the mind in the Philippians passage? Instead of worry and anxiety, Paul says let your mind dwell on that which is good, and true and pure.

But not only does St. Paul tell us not to worry or be afraid, let's look at what the Lord Himself says. Please turn with me to **Matthew 6:24-33**: Jesus said, "***No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?...But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.***"

GOD'S KINGDOM

So there it is again, "***Do not worry***" – and specifically in regards to what? What we eat, drink and wear.

Now what's the counter to worry, what's the remedy? "***Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.***" My friends that is the answer. It is the answer to our personal problems. It is the answer to the problems of this world.

You see there are two kingdoms. The kingdom of God under Jesus Christ, and the kingdom of this world is under the god of this world, Satan. Now God in His wisdom has given us free will, we have the freedom to make choices for good and for ill. We can choose to follow the Kingdom of God or we can choose to remain in the kingdom of this world. Jesus said, "***Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand.***" If I repent, I have to make a choice. And Jesus said that if you want to enter the Kingdom of God, you must be born again and if you are to be born again you must have faith like a child. To have faith like a child means to trust even when you don't see.

And once we turn our lives over to God, we are now tapping into His realm and His power. And where God seemingly does not rule, He overrules according to His Sovereign plan. And so the challenge for all of us is to live into God's Kingdom and get with His program, with His will. You see when Jesus talks about the Kingdom, He is talking about His realm, His power, His ways. The Kingdom is where the King rules.

Now what is true about the Kingdom? The Kingdom of God is infinite - there is always an abundance. However, the kingdom of this world is finite, there is always scarcity. Remember the feeding of the 5000 and the 4000? Jesus took some loaves and some fish and multiplied them and fed everyone and there was plenty of leftovers. Or how about when Peter asked the Lord how they were to pay the temple tax in **Mt.17:24-27**? Jesus told Peter to go and throw a hook in the water and the first fish he caught to open its mouth where he would find a stater or shekel - the equivalent of 4 drachmas or four day's wages, enough to pay for both Jesus and Peter! You see how there is no lack with the Lord.

The kingdom is eternal, it lasts forever, the world is temporal, it passes away. In the Kingdom there is always peace. Jesus said, "My peace I give to you, my own peace I leave with you." But the world only offers conflict and turmoil. In the Kingdom there is healing. In the world, there is sickness and disease. In the Kingdom there is forgiveness, in the world there is condemnation and bitterness. The Kingdom gives life, the world offers death. Yes there are only two realms: the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world.

So the key to any and every situation, the key to this financial crisis is we need to get our eyes off the world and onto the King and His kingdom. And when we begin to seek the Kingdom, then the

worries of this world will fade away. You start to see what is possible with God rather than what is impossible with this world.

And there is something else we need to understand about the Kingdom – ultimately it’s all God’s. We are simply stewards. In other words, everything we have is the Lord’s. Our possessions, our talents, our bodies everything is His. And that is why after salvation, Jesus talks the most about stewardship. St. Paul says in **I Cor. 4:2** *that it is required of stewards that one be found faithful*. And so you see in God’s realm, in His economy, a steward does not have rights, a steward has responsibilities and the responsibility is that he or she be found faithful. Are you faithful with what God has given you?

GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS

How are we to be faithful? Not only are we to seek God’s Kingdom we are to *seek His righteousness*. What does that mean that we make sure we are in the habit of doing what is right, and good and pure and acceptable? It is doing what God wants. You see you can’t expect to experience the blessing of the Kingdom if you aren’t doing what is right.

Why are we in this mess? Because the folks in Washington and on Wall Street have not been concerned with doing what is right. They are more concerned with their personal pocketbooks. Many on Wall Street want to make a quick profit and many in Washington what to stay in power and so they get ear marks for their constituents, and they encouraged banks to offer easy money, easy credit. And then this gives many on Main Street who want something for nothing the illusion that they too can make an easy buck. Illusions of wealth that ultimately have no depth or stability to them. As the old saying goes, “Easy come easy go.” And what do the Scriptures teach over and over again? If you build your life on wealth then you are building your life on sand. The sad fact is that we are mortgaging our future.

We cannot put our trust in money. It is a false hope. It is a lie of Satan. And you know it’s interesting when you think about there are two things motivate the market – fear and greed. And neither one is of God.

Now what does this mean for you and me?

First do not worry. Limit you exposure to negative talk. If I watch too much TV news I get depressed. I really do. I have to limit my exposure. Don’t get too involved in negative talk. That doesn’t solve a thing, but seek first the Kingdom. Remember where our help comes? **Ps. 121: Our help comes from the Lord the maker of heaven and earth.** And Remember to seek first not just the Kingdom but the righteousness of God. **Ps. 37:25** says *“I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging for bread.”* God will take care of us.

Now on a more practical level; make a budget, get out of debt, outside of a mortgage and a car loan you should not be in debt. I know some may have student loans but once they are paid off, don’t be buying more than you can afford by getting into debt for extras. The Bible actually warns against going into debt. In fact, the word, “mortgage” comes from the Latin “mort” which means “death,” and “gage” which means “grip.” So mortgage literally means “death grip.”

GIVERS NOT TAKERS

Finally, something else that we need to remember, and that is we need to maintain a giving attitude. Too often, we can start to feel like we need to hoard things or to not be so inclined to give to the work of the church and those in need when we are in hard economic times. That is human nature. It is the normal response. But we are not to be normal. We are to be in the world but not of it. And that means we need to continue to give. It's one of the principles of the Kingdom. Jesus said in **Lk. 6:38**: *"Give and it will be given unto you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be poured into your lap. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return."*

You see there's two types of people in this world. There's the givers and there's the takers. What's the difference between the two? A taker eats better, a giver sleeps better. Because a giver knows who their source of provision is. A giver knows that they have been, are and will be blessed by the Living God.

Now I want you to listen for a moment to these important verses from God's Word:

Proverbs 19:17: *"Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and will be repaid in full."*

Proverbs 22:9: *"He who is generous will be blessed, for he gives some of his food to the poor."*

Proverbs 28:27: *"Whoever gives to the poor will lack nothing, but one who turns a blind eye will get many a curse."*

Jeremiah 22:16: *"He pled the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not that what it means to know Me declares the Lord?"*

You see we are called to be there for one another. Not to worry but to seek first the Kingdom and His righteousness. That means remembering that life is not about stuff, it's not about our possessions, or personal pleasure, but it is about our relationships, with the Lord and one another, and that means being there for our earthly family and it means being there for our church family. What else is there? What else is really important? Money and possessions can be replaced. People cannot.

So during these troubled times, may we remember the timeless wisdom of our Lord. *"Don't worry about what you will wear, or drink or eat, but seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you."* In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!