

January 1, 2017 "Things To Think About" Matthew 6:25-33

We were driving home from the grocery store yesterday, and Barbara asked me the question of the hour. "Tomorrow," she said, "I will be worshiping at Stirling. Next Sunday I will be at St. Columba. And this is New Year's Eve. What are we going to increase our givings to at St. Columba? And we agreed on a number in a matter of minutes." And I mention that for this one reason. The turning of the final page on the past year's calendar is always an opportunity to think about very real, very practical issues. And it was with that thought in mind that over a month ago I chose the Scripture reading for today's service. The simple fact is, this portion gives us a minimum of 10 things to think about...and they all have to do, with this single insight, that God is more concerned about our well being than we ever are. I will say that again: God is more concerned about our well being, than we ever are. Think about that!

I also have to confess that once again, I am reminded that our trip to Israel, just before I was diagnosed with cancer in 2015 has touched how I see every passage from the Bible that I have read, ever since. This morning's verses are taken from the Sermon on the Mount, as it is shared with us in Matthew's Gospel, beginning with the Beatitudes. There is a beautiful church that marks the spot where that event occurred in Galilee. I can still remember the emotion that overswept my mind and my soul as I stood at the wrought iron fence looking down the slope to the Sea of Galilee, a slope of more than 2 kilometers, thinking somewhere between where I am standing and several hundred yards from the shores of Galilee, Jesus stood and taught this lesson.

I said there were at least 10 things to think about here. This is how my list begins. The very first thing Jesus conveyed to

2.

HIS followers on that sloping piece of meadowland was this: 1) Life is more important than food or clothing. We have just come through one of the greatest food-fests of the year. Christmas, literally means “the Christ Feast.” The carol, “Good King Wenceslas” reminds us that it has been a tradition for those who have food and drink to share their abundance with the less fortunate for a long time. And those who support that tradition did not in those long ago days, give away their last scrap of food, any more than we do. Those who had, feasted. They shared out of their abundance as we do in food drives for food banks, the Salvation Army and many other groups who want to see that no one is without food at Christmas time. It was to people who were by no means starving that Jesus taught this lesson. Life of the body, life of the spirit (what we call the soul) is more important than food and drink, clothing, and any other material thing for which we hunger. I was tempted to say “for which we covet.”

2nd. Jesus talks about the birds. I wrote from Israel last year about the moving experience of discovering that the sparrows looked the same in Israel as the sparrows that frequent my bird feeder at the farmhouse in the summer season. He is talking about “humble birds,” common, and ordinary birds. Sparrows, sea gulls, crows, starlings. He says, they do not plant in the sowing season. They do not harvest in the Fall of the year. They do not keep storage barns. “Yet, your heavenly Father feeds them.” It is God and God alone who feeds them, provides for them, sustains them. And if we want to argue that Nature sustains them, the truth is we have simply substituted another word for God, because we failed to value God's presence and power as Lord of the creation. God provides food for the birds.

3rd in this list of things to think about is the question that

3.

Jesus asked having made HIS observation about the birds. “Are you not much more valuable than they?” He is addressing people who work for a living. Fishermen. Women. People who are at the lowest rungs of the social ladder. People who are practical. Who do not have time or energy and we might even be tempted to say, who are not sophisticated enough to spend hours in philosophical debate. They lived in the real world. And their answer to that question is to be certain, yes people are more valuable than crows and the rest of the bird life we see every day. And the only logical conclusion one can draw after that insight is, if God provides for the birds, He provides for me as well.

4th thing to think about. Jesus immediately changes HIS metaphors. He starts talking about the lilies. Barbara and I have made a real push at 24 Sherwood Crescent to grow day lilies. They are so beautiful. The colours are so rich. Jesus is saying a number of things about the lilies. God provides their class and beauty. They do not last long. But we do. We outlast those beautiful blooms more than a thousand fold. Jesus asks the question, “Why do you worry about clothes?” Because HE knows we do? He makes the blanket observation, God loves you so much more than lilies. He will provide clothing.

Because He is a loving and redeeming God. And you are the most important part of His creation. That is what Jesus is saying.

Number 5 on this list of things to think about as 2017 begins: “O you of little faith.” Yes, it sounds better when you say it as “O ye of little faith!” But Jesus is talking about you,..and me. Us. And it is not as simple as to say HE has concluded we are a faithless and worthless generation. That is not the point at all. Here is what it is about. HE has heard our objections to HIS 3rd and 4th points even

4.

though we have known enough not to say them out loud. HE said God will provide food. HE said, God will provide clothing. And HE heard our quiet, what we thought were private objections that all began with the word “but.” But I don't have a lot of money. But I don't have a job. But people don't give away food and clothing to people like me! O ye of little faith. Jesus is saying our practical objections reveal we would sooner say “I can't” than to live as people who believe, “God can.” HE is able, more than able.

Number 6... Think about it. Do not waste energy, strength and creativity on worry. I worry way too much. Some of you have said to me, “You have so much faith!” I worry a lot. And I will confess the depth of that sin. In me it is sin. I worry about things that never happen, never come to pass, never touch my life or the lives of those I love. I waste tons of energy, strength and creativity on worry. Jesus says, “Don't.” I gotta work on that.

Number 7... Think about it. Verse 32. Jesus says, “People who do not believe (the pagans). People who do not believe in God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, they run after all these things. HE is not saying you are paganish in your ways. HE is not saying you are wicked. HE is not even saying you and I are terrible sinners. HE is saying, You know God is real. You know Jesus saves. You know the Spirit of God has touched you and is in you. Depend on the Lord your God. Consciously depend on God in 2017. Make it your goal to live as God's child. Share what you receive with others. Believe God will give you opportunity to give away some of what you have to meet real need on the part of others. Think about it.

Think about number 8 on this list. A very clear statement. Jesus says, “Your Heavenly Father knows that you need food,

5.

clothing, shelter, fuel, etc.” Your Heavenly Father knows what you need. Think about it. Weigh it. Hold to HIM. Hold to God's unchanging hand.

Here is number 9. I did not invent this. And if you are wondering, I have increased my offering for St. Andrew's just as Barbara has increased her offerings to St. Columba. And yes, if you are wondering, we support both churches with time and talent and treasure. Jesus said, “Seek HIS kingdom first. Invest in the Kingdom of God, the King of Kings. Invest in being right by HIS standards. I am not pretending that is easy. The world undermines us at every turn. But according to Jesus, if we put God and HIS Kingdom first, we will see that things will unfold according to HIS will in the practical realities of every day living. Think about it. Pray about it. Consider the sparrows and the lilies of the field.

The 10th thing to think about has to do with reviewing the whole package 1 through 9. “Do not worry about tomorrow. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” Here is what Jesus is saying. There is only one time you can really influence. It is the present. Deal with today. When tomorrow becomes today, deal with today. When a week from now becomes today, deal with it because it is the present. I wrestle with every principle listed here. Why? Because I want to seize control of my destiny. Here is another fact. My attempts at control, is why I recognized my need for a Saviour, my need for God, my need for HIS Spirit, saving me from me. Think about it....think about it.

Let us pray;

Lord we choose to exercise faith. We have chosen YOU as Lord of our lives or we would not be here during this hour. And

6.

yet having said that we are so often weighed down by worries concerning the future, and how we will hang the parts of our life together. We worry about the bills that will come in during the coming year. We worry about the well being of our church, which really means we worry about ourselves and where we would worship if anything happened to this band of brothers and sisters. Forgive us. Help us to trust YOU...and let the chips fall where they may. In Jesus name we pray. Amen