

Service of Replenishment and Hope for Caregivers  
Feb 2, 2016

Sermon: *Finding Hope, Today, Again*  
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Matthew 6:25-34

“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? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and God’s righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

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We read this passage at our wedding. It was my dad's idea. I'm not sure if we read it because of all the powerful language encouraging us not to be anxious. Or because of the beautiful imagery of flowers and birds clothed in effortless splendor. Or the assurance of God's care through whatever comes. Sometimes I think Dad suggested it for our wedding because of the last line – Today's trouble is enough for today.

So true. Today – even if it's your best day – today always has enough troubles – plenty of troubles -- and all too often -- too many troubles.

And here's Jesus telling us not to worry. That there are better things to do than worry. If only it were so easy.

Today is Groundhog Day. (That great holiday in the liturgical life of the church...)

Groundhog Day coincides with the celebration of Candlemas – the day halfway between the winter solstice and the spring equinox. Tradition says that, if the day is sunny and the groundhog emerges from its burrow and sees its shadow, it scurries back inside, and winter will last 6 more weeks.

We all want to do that sometimes. Scurry back into a cozy place where we can close our eyes and dream that everything is the way we want it to be. (I wanted to do that this morning when the alarm rang.) Don't you envy the groundhog a little bit? Six more weeks of winter, and a world of big scary storms and shadows out there, and the groundhog gets to crawl back to someplace safe and escape it all -- while we have no choice but to live every day buffeted by disruptions beyond our control and haunted by the shadows of hopes and dreams that are slipping away. The worries of what might come next. The exhaustion and expense of caretaking. The regret of neglected responsibilities. The loneliness of becoming the sole curator of memories that used to be shared.

*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?*

Yes, life is so much more than food and clothing, but some days just getting everybody fed and dressed counts as a major success.

The thing is -- that was true for a lot of the folks listening to Jesus way back 2000 years ago. Folks for whom life was a daily struggle just to survive. And Jesus says, to people weary with fetching water and tending meager flocks and coaxing tiny shoots of grain from dry and rocky ground – Jesus says to them – and to us -- don't neglect to smell the flowers – or at least look at them, with all their colors – and remember – even King Solomon's best designers couldn't come up with beauty like that. And God provides it free, for everyone to enjoy. And the birds – have you listened to the birds singing lately? Their song can restore your soul.

Jesus tells people burdened by fears for tomorrow – Jesus tells them that, by God's grace, even in the midst of worry, joy can take root. God has not forgotten them – or us. After all, God goes to the trouble of cultivating beauty in tiny flowers and little birds. God is planting seeds of possibility for all of us as well.

Not that it's always easy to find or see that possibility. Jesus is not naïve. Jesus knows how hard it can be to look beyond the immediate crisis without becoming overwhelmed by worry over the next one. But Jesus encourages us, even when we are burdened by worries and cares that take all our strength – Jesus encourages us to seek what really matters – today, don't focus on things we cannot change – today, seek the

things that God knows we really need – love, compassion. Goodness. Justice. Mercy. And we will find beauty, wonder, hope. God will see to that. Because God has not left us alone. And God has not abandoned our loved ones either.

My grandmother had Alzheimer’s Disease. This was a woman who had been a college professor in the late 1920s, who had traveled from her home in Oklahoma to get a graduate degree at Boston University and all her life was a leader in the church and community. And in her later years, when all of that had slipped away, she would often repeat the same two syllable phrase, over and over, with a kind of musically repetitive sing-song tone. When our whole family was together, my dad and my uncles would start to sing along with her, adding harmony, and complementary musical phrases. The nonsense song would soar and drop and variously take the form of jazz or blues or something more classical. It was silly. Beautiful. Tragic. Funny. Heartbreakingly sad. Heartwarmingly rich. But it was also a gift – like the colors of the lilies of the field and the melody of the birds outside the window – it was, in that moment, a drop of joy, mingled with the drops of tears.

God knows we needed every drop of joy we could find.

Have you seen the movie Groundhog Day?

In the movie, newscaster Phil Collins goes to report on Punxsutawney Phil – the groundhog – emerging from his den in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. Phil Collins is a frustrated, unhappy, self-centered, ambitious, arrogant weather forecaster, with no healthy relationships with anyone. A snowstorm prevents Phil and his crew from leaving town, so they spend the night. And when Phil wakes up the next day, it’s still February 2. And the same thing happens again. Every day when he wakes up it is the same day – it’s Groundhog Day – and he has to live it over and over again. He indulges his worst impulses on some days. He intentionally messes things up for others. Eventually he tries to kill himself. Over and over. And he laments – he can never get to tomorrow.

But then, he stops expecting tomorrow to come. He stops expecting to get beyond the narrow limits of his world. And he starts to find ways to make each day better, and by doing that he becomes less anxious about what he’ll discover when he wakes up the next day. He starts to take advantage of the time he has to learn things. To grow to be a better person. To notice other people and to go out of his way to help them. He has to live the same predictable day over and over again, and it nearly drives him mad. But he finds a bit of peace when he finally stops trying to escape from it, stops focusing on what isn’t possible, lets go of trying to control his world and simply uses all he’s learned to help the people he can help, bring whatever joy he can to folks around him, treat people with kindness, and start living the life he’s been given instead of trying to escape it.

And then, only then, he wakes up to a new tomorrow.

Phil Collins relives the same day over and over until he gets it right.

For most of us, our days will probably never be quite right. We’ve made plans, shared hopes and dreams, created mental images of the life we wanted – and in too many ways it’s not the life we have. We awaken each morning to a reality we neither chose nor sought. And yet, God is still here, dropping seeds of possibility all around us.

We will never live the perfect Feb 2. Because, as much as we might want to crawl into a burrow or jump into a movie to escape the scary shadows and cold winters of life – we can’t.

But, you know, if the groundhog sees its shadow, it hides away and winter lasts about 6 more weeks. But if it doesn't see its shadow – if it emerges into the light where the rest of us live, and struggles through the days consumed with the burdens of food and water and shelter and the tasks of daily life – if the groundhog doesn't see its shadow and instead enters into life, do you know how long it takes until spring comes? About 6 weeks.

The life we have may not be the one we planned for or wanted. We cannot help but grieve the absence of all that we hoped for that is not.

But at the same time, the truth is, grief is the price we pay for loving, for caring, for dreaming, for seeking those things that really matter – those things Jesus was talking about – those things God cares about – compassion, love, goodness, justice, mercy. Grief is the price we pay for allowing ourselves to be vulnerable to life, to love and be loved, to hope and to dream – to be open to joy and laughter and companionship and forgiveness and possibility.

The life we have may not be the one we planned for or wanted. But that does not mean it cannot be good.

We are here today halfway from winter to spring. And we cannot make spring come faster and we cannot hold it off, no matter how much we worry over it. The life we have is a gift – a collage of memories and music, of opportunities and sorrows, of doubt and faith, shadows and hope.

We often remind ourselves sometimes that, in the face of memories that are slipping away, it is really important to appreciate whatever is good today, because we do not know what tomorrow will be like. And that's true.

But it is also true even without the challenges of fading memories or declining health -- none of us ever know what tomorrow will bring. The worry that seems most pressing today may be replaced by another worry tomorrow. Today is always the right day to consider the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, and to be grateful. Today is always a good day to turn our sorrow and regret and crippling disappointments over to God, who treasures us more than the beautiful lilies and melodious birds, who forgives us, who wants good for us, and who will never let us go.

And today, even when the shadows seem oh so scary and we feel oh so overwhelmed – even then, the good news is that God is planting seeds of joy and hope that will surprise us in ways we don't anticipate, and give us strength.

Today's troubles really are enough for today. But, we are not alone in this life we have been given. In the midst of today's troubles, and tomorrows, and next week's and next year's – God is planting seeds of hope and beauty. Consider the lilies of the field and the birds of the air – God cares for them, and even more, God cares for you, and me, and all who share this world with us. In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

Amen.