

Thanksgiving Eve
November 25, 2015
The Rev. Denise Trogdon, Rector

Finding Serenity in an Anxious World

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference, Amen.

This familiar serenity prayer written by theologian Reinhold Niebuhr is said all over the world, several times a day, at the close of most recovery group meetings. It is a prayer of both surrender and empowerment, prescribed for those seeking peace in the midst of life's troubles. In my practice as a therapist, I often encountered families torn apart by the ravages of addiction. I, too, learned this prayer, recognizing my own limitations in being able to help. Surrendering our own agendas can open the possibilities for God's abundant grace to be at work in us, but we have to be willing to let go of our anxiety.

Most of us might consider that a ridiculous thought- that we would want to hold onto our worry. But worry is something we do in response to our fears. It fills the void and preoccupies us when we cannot see or imagine God's providential care. Perhaps we believe that if we worry enough, we might be able to control the outcome.

Tonight's reading from Matthew taken from the Sermon on the Mount might seem like simple platitudes to our very complex world. Don't worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will wear. Look at the birds of the air, your heavenly Father feeds them. Consider the lilies and how God clothes them. It is one of those scriptures I hear and my first response is, "yeah but..." followed by a myriad of reasons I have to worry. But if we actually put into practice what Jesus suggests, we might become the catalyst for our own serenity and the peace of those around us.

Jesus' teaching not only calls disciples to trust in God for their needs, it is a reminder of the significance which God gives to each of our lives. Our culture would have us believe that we are of value only if we produce, if we hold power, if we have things. Jesus describes a different value system that reveres life in all of its frailty. When Jesus asks his disciples to surrender their fears he does not leave them in a void. He offers them a realm of generosity, possibility and new life, and encourages them to seek this kingdom. This means moving beyond the self and entering into relationship with God whose resources are abundant and infinite. And when we notice our neighbor's need and reach out in compassion to help, we participate in building the kingdom right here in our midst.

In a time when every day we hear of a new threat to our safety, more financial insecurity, and dwindling natural resources, how do we let go of our worries? First, I think we are called to remember. Recalling the promises fulfilled in our lifetime and God's abundant faithfulness throughout history assures us of the grace we are given simply because we are beloved children of God. When we forget from whom our blessings flow, we are left feeling that we must produce and hold on to our bounty. That, my friends, is the beginning of anxiety.

Second, we are invited to notice the ways great and small God is working in our lives in the present and give thanks. Gratitude has a way of opening our hearts to experience contentment

and to share this with others. Melody Beattie, a renowned author in the field of addiction and recovery writes, *“Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow.”*

Finally, it is not enough to notice and be thankful for what we have. Seeking the kingdom means affecting change in our world so that others’ needs are met. In the kingdom of God our well-being is intricately linked to the well-being of others. When we become separated and divisive, fear drives our actions rather than gratitude. Watch the news today and you will see that terror is shaping our collective response to the stranger in our midst.

The story of the first Thanksgiving is just one account of a community that had every reason to live in fear, but chose to trust in God’s providential care. In December of 1620, when the pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock, it was the dead of winter. The new colony struggled with meager food, strenuous labor, and the ravages of disease. Half of the 102 Mayflower passengers did not live to see the spring. God’s provision came in the form of the men and women who already inhabited the land. The Indian tribes came together to help the settlers plant, hunt and fish in this new environment. The bountiful harvest that autumn, led the Governor to invite their neighbors to celebrate God’s goodness. Ninety braves accepted the invitation to join the Pilgrims in a feast of Thanksgiving to God for all of God’s blessings. When neighbors reached out to one another, a community was created that no longer lived in fear.

On this eve of Thanksgiving as we recall God’s abundant care for us and give thanks for all of our blessings, I pray that we can find the courage to let go of our worries and seek the kingdom. Our serenity comes in trusting that God will take charge of those things we cannot change and will empower us to change the things we can. When we persevere through trials trusting in God’s goodness, we witness to a terrified world that there is a more peaceful and gracious way of living. When we look for the eternal in the everyday with eyes of faith, we pass onto other generations the gift of hope. When we live in the world in a way that moves it towards God’s reality, we become faithful stewards of God’s promises. No matter what the circumstance, we determine whether we live in fear or promise. The German mystic Meister Eckert said if the only prayer you make is “thank you,” that will suffice. May we all find serenity as we reach out to one another to build God’s kingdom. Amen