

Proper 23 A
St. Matthew 22:1-14
October 15, 2017
St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

Power of the Positive

“Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

God is near. What comforting words! Do not worry. Set aside your anxieties. And if you are worried about something, let your requests be made known to God. God will protect your hearts and give you God's peace.

Isn't this what we all desire in our heart of hearts, to be free from our worries? Are these not words of promise that we all want to hear?

We live in times of anxiety. We are anxious about many things: jobs, finances, health, the future, even the weather. Name just about anything, and we can find a way to be anxious and fearful about it. Such anxiousness wears you down. Such fear is truly toxic to our wellbeing.

How does one cope with all that stuff which invades our lives daily?

Well, we could just bury our heads in the sand. We can cancel our subscription to the newspaper and turn off the TV. I must admit, there have been times recently when I do something just like that. I turn off the TV when I get on overload from the talking heads arguing and talking over one another while doing verbal battle. This reveals to me the open wounds and lack of civility in our discourse. So I silence the television and sit quietly. Sometimes I do something else, but often I pray in that space, that silence, when that noise is turned off. I also know quite well there is no running away from it, and I am reminded also there is no escaping my own personal worries and concerns. However, I know I need strength to face them. From whence is that strength to come, do you suppose? [see Psalm 121]

When I seek this peace, I often go out on my balcony and sit where I can be closer to nature and view it peacefully. I sit quietly and observe. I am privileged to see for

miles the beauty which the Lord has given us: a canvas of greens and a palate of paint of fall colors blossoming in front of me, a sign of the annual ritual of nature closing one season and preparing for the next, which even in its starkness will bring me great beauty as the snow falls on this canvas in front of me. I am motivated to give thanks to the Lord for all this beauty and abundant bounty that I see in front of me. An overwhelming feeling of gratefulness comes over me.

Up close, a small bird lands on the balcony railing. I quietly observe his activities, trying desperately not to disturb him. I ponder what it must be like to fly about without fear, and to find a perch like this above the treetops. As I ponder this scene, I think to myself, he has his anxieties also: Where will he get his next meal? Will he find enough to feed his young ones? Will he be safe from others who wish to prey upon him?

Yet this little bird is different from me. These future oriented questions that I have just recited and projected upon him are in my mind, not his. I fear these sorts of things because I can comprehend the future as a human being. This bird lives in the eternal now of God, and in this now, there is peace. God feeds the birds and the animals without their worry. And if a predator comes, the worry lasts only a few moments, not hours and days and years as such worry sets in in my own mind. Animals and birds are fortunate to live in this eternal now, with a God's eye view of the garden God has created and placed them in. How silly they would find our worries and fears, if they could comprehend them. They would teach us and do teach us by their presence to live otherwise and by their example.

Yes, I am saying take a lesson from God's creatures. Look at your dog or cat or pet rabbit, or gerbil and remember how they express love. It is unlike most of our human love, for it is so unconditional. They love us no matter what. We can have a bad day or do bad things or fail to meet our expectations of ourselves, and they still love us no matter what, anyway. It is an uncomplicated, simple love, a love with which we are called by Jesus to love others in this world. It is the love with which God loves us.

The peace of God that passes all understanding is the promised answer to our prayers and supplications. Paul reminds us that it will guard our hearts. God is not shown providing answers to our individual moment by moment anxieties. We are not promised money for our financial fears or a special pill to heal our health anxieties. We are promised the peace of God to protect our hearts. Why?

Why? Because our hearts are the seat of God and our faith. Our heart is where we feel the love God has loved us with. Our heart is the seat of our soul within us.

They are the core that motivates us and give us the power and ability to face the new day and whatever it brings us, like the bird on my balcony railing. Life goes on. God is near, nearer than we realize most of the time. Though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I shall not fear, because You are near, walking with me, Your rod and Your staff, reminders of Your comforting presence to me.

The knowledge that God is near and that we are not alone to face our fears and anxieties is good news. God's presence, when we tap into it, brings us peace. The power of fear and anxiety, drops away like scales from our eyes, and we can see again the beauty and peace of God all around us. Life is good, not horrible or bad, nor just "so-so." God is near. No matter what we face, God will be near us, guiding us and walking us through it to the other end, where there is light and hope and most of all, love and peace.

Now that we discover this peace to quell our tired minds and put off our fear, what do we do with this new found peace? How do we live?

Paul said it so well in the Epistle to the Philippians this morning:
Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you."

Think positive. Remember who you are and who you belong to. We are God's beloved. Do not forget that. Focus on the things in life that are true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent, and you will feel closer to God. Think positive. Find the positive in life, in the world, in others. There are plenty of positive things to see and to be grateful for. Focus on fear and the negative, and you will be dragged down, away from God's peace into the pit of anxiety. There is power in positive thinking. There is great power in being grateful each morning and throughout the day for the magnitude and multiplicity of blessings God has showered upon us. God will provide for your needs. Stemming from the peace of God that is in you, let your gentleness, kindness and peacefulness be known to all around you!

And remember the animals. Think about them, not just today, but every day. If he feeds the birds of the air, will he not much more feed and care for you? AMEN