

CENTRAL UNITED CHURCH WINDSOR

Called to be a caring and welcoming community of faith and witness for Christ in downtown Windsor

Website: centralunitedchurchwindsor.com

OCTOBER 10 2021

THANKSGIVING SUNDAY- PRESIDING: PASTOR CHARMAIN

His Eye Is On The Sparrow

Scripture: Matthew 6: 25-33

Reflection: What an amazing time in history to count our blessings and give thanks... A world pandemic has ravaged our earth for just over 20 months now, and we have lost so much, and so many people. It's been heartbreaking in many ways. And yet I think we have a strong case for saying Thank you to our creator.

We are still here, but it feels like some of the things that we have held dear are slipping away, things are just not as they were before, everything is changing so rapidly, and we are growing afraid.

Fear, worry...we've all known it. We've all lived it.

Statistics say that North Americans in this century live with more stress and worry than ever before. And yet we live longer than ever before, we have a higher standard of living with less danger, with and more security than ever before. What this tells me is that much of what we fear or worry is self imposed.

And we all know this from those times when we wake up at 3 in the morning and toss and turn worrying about things. When am I going to get that house project done? Will I have enough money to retire? What task should I start with at

work tomorrow? Will my kids and grandkids be okay when I am no longer around?

I heard someone say that the problem with worry is that it is very selfish. It wants all our attention. But the more attention we give it the more it grows and the more it takes over other aspects of our lives.

Another problem with worry is it robs us of the moment. It robs us of taking in joy of this moment by rushing us into the future and keeping us stuck in the past.

One of my favourite movies is Eat, Pray, Love, and there's a great scene where the main character is at an Ashram in India. She is in this beautiful context surrounded by amazing people on this spiritual journey. But as she starts to meditate you begin to hear her thoughts What am I going to do next year! Where will I live, will I live in New York or Chicago, and if I move to New York will my same friends be there. Stop it You're supposed to be praying.....

And haven't we all had that experience of having beauty and joy right before us, but we can't capture it because we are worried or we're thinking about this thing or that, rushing into the future in fear or anxiety.

But of course there are things that are truly concerning in life. There are always those issues which aren't the mundane self-imposed worry that we can get caught up in. They are the things that really matter and that we can legitimately lose sleep over.

Like whether that medical condition we've been diagnosed with is going to worsen or get better. Like whether our children or grandchildren will be safe when we know that currently they are making choices that jeopardize their safety. You know, life or death situations...

In the gospel lesson we just read from, Jesus says "Don't worry" seven times. But then he mentions a lot of things worthy of being concerned about....they're going to be arrested, and beaten, persecuted, and some of them will be killed....but yet he says 'don't worry'! This is his great commissioning to the disciples and to us.

So why does Jesus do this? Why does he say we shouldn't worry in the context of the problems that will come our way? Because Jesus is keeping it real! There are bad things that happen in life. No power on earth can change that. We will all have heartaches, and disappointments, we will all have illness to face and suffering to endure.

But, we can't live in fear because these things might happen. Instead, Jesus says, "Lean into the love, faith and the hope that I am giving you....because no matter what happens, God is going to be with us even until the end of the age!"

This is the triumph of our relationship with Christ, as a body of Christ and as people in the kingdom of God. We are given a gift of faith, and courage and not cowardice, and we can lean into God's promise of giving us a future with hope. When we focus on the things that matter...

and they may sound cliché to you, but when we are grounded in love, kindness, fairness and looking after each

other, we foster a faith that makes us keep an eye on the prize, and we stop getting distracted by the little things. It's only when we foster and nurture a deep faith in God that we can really see the things that we ought to be thankful for.

Oh... we see the physical and tangible things that we do give thanks for, the sun and rain, the beautiful earth and creatures and sustaining and delicious food. But we are given so much more than that that we really don't often think about.

Grace.... God's grace... that is given so freely... that assures us that we don't need to worry. I mean, we need to put the right things in place, including our hearts, and then we summon our faith, that lets us know that God will take it from here... we needn't worry...

Jesus offers this image. If two sparrows fall to the ground, does God not notice? God's provident care and grace is stressed by two captivating images: Not even sparrows, birds sold cheaply as food for the poor, "fall to the ground" without God noticing.

I never tire of the story of the keyboard player and his band playing in New York City...

He says: It was a chilly night, and Apparently we were striking all the right chords that night, because our basket was almost overflowing. It was a fun low-pressure gig. I was playing keyboard and singing backup for my friend.

During our emotional rendition of the classic, "If You Don't Know Me by Now," I noticed a lady sitting in one of the lounge chairs across from me.

She was swaying to the beat and singing along. After the tune was over, she approached me. "I apologize for singing along to that song. Did it bother you?" she asked. "No, we love it when the audience joins in. Would you like to sing up front on the next selection?" To my delight, she accepted my invitation.

"You choose," I said. "What are you in the mood to sing?" "Well.... do you know any hymns?" Hymns? This woman didn't know who she was talking to! I cut my teeth on hymns. Before I was even born, I was going to church. I gave our guest singer a knowing look.

"Name one." "Oh, I don't know. There are so many good ones. You pick one." "Okay," I replied. "How about 'His Eye is on the Sparrow'?" My new friend was silent, her eyes averted. Then she fixed her eyes on mine again and said, "Yeah. Let's do that one."

She slowly nodded her head, put down her purse, straightened her jacket and faced the center of the shop. With my two-bar setup, she began to sing, "Why should I be discouraged? Why should the shadows come?"

The audience of coffee drinkers was transfixed. Even the gurgling noises of the Cappuccino machine ceased as employees stopped what they were doing to listen. The song rose to its conclusion. "I sing because I'm happy; I sing

because I'm free! For His eye is on the Sparrow and I know He watches me."

When the last note was sung, the applause crescendoed to a deafening roar that would have rivaled a sold-out crowd at Carnegie Hall. Embarrassed, the woman tried to shout over the din, "Oh, y'all go back to your coffee! I didn't come in here to do a concert! I just came to get somethin' warm to drink, like you!"

But the ovation continued. I embraced my new friend. "You, my dear, have made my whole year! That was beautiful!" "Well, it's funny you picked that particular song," she said. "Why is that?" I asked. "Well," she hesitated again, "that was my daughter's favorite song."

"Really!" I exclaimed. "Yes," and then she grabbed my hands. By this time, the applause had subsided and it was business as usual. "She was 16 and died of a brain tumor last week."

I said the first thing that found its way through my stunned silence. "Are you going to be okay?" She smiled through tear-filled eyes and squeezed my hands. "I'm going to be okay. I've just got to keep trusting the Lord and singing His songs -- everything's going to be just fine." She picked up her bag, gave me her card, and she was gone.

This weekend is a time designated to give thanks, and we do. But can we look beyond the physical to see the other things we are blessed with? When we really think about it, our gratitude will soar at the gift of God's grace, that calls us to be a faithful people.

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Today we called to give thanks, for all the things around us, and for all the things that are within us too.... For it all, we do say... Thanks be to God, Amen.....

Offertory Prayer: Merciful God, the gifts we bring are so small in comparison to the vast needs in our world— nowhere near enough to save the thousands dying of starvation all around the world, or even to meet the needs of the hungry and homeless in our city. Yet we have brought what we can.

As You once multiplied the five small loaves and two fish, multiply these gifts as well, so that, once again, the hungry may receive all they need, and more. Amen.

Prayers of the People: Merciful Father, you have protected the fruits of the earth and crowned the year with your blessing. We give you thanks for physical health, for the use of our senses, and for our intellect and thought. Make us good stewards of our abilities that we may bring glory to your name every day. Lord in your mercy: **hear our prayer**

We give you thanks Almighty God for supplying us with water. Help us to care for and manage our water resources wisely. Have mercy on those who are suffering drought, and supply clean water to all who need it. Lord in your mercy: **hear our prayer**

We give you thanks, gracious Father, for all the good things the earth produces. By your provision we are clothed and fed and lack no good thing. Care for those who live in want and teach us to be generous with the gifts you have first given us. Lord in your mercy: **hear our prayer**

We give you thanks, Lord God, for the opportunity to work, learn and rest. Help us to serve you and others faithfully in our vocation; and provide work for the unemployed. Bless all places of learning and students. Help them to learn what is good, true and beautiful, to distinguish between right and wrong, and to contribute to the needs of our society. Give them strength and growth for the challenges ahead. Lord in your mercy: **hear our prayer**

Gracious God, be with us. Bless our United Church of Canada and our individual charges. Bless our church here, and its families. We pray for our sick and shut ins..... We lift to you those who are close to our hearts....

We join in the world churches in prayers for the countries of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Panama. We give you thanks and praise gracious god, and we ask it all in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray....