

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time -2020A

Matthew 11:25-30

Sooner or later most of us wake up to the sense that the life we are living is not exactly the life we hoped it might be. We realize that life has its burdens, three of which are prominent.

The first is the burden of daily irritations: you know, standing in line at the Post Office or at the Department of Motor Vehicles; forced to listen to elevator music while on hold for a half hour; or trying to figure out tax forms. The frictions and irritations of daily life are a burden we all bear.

The second burden includes the more serious stuff of life: poverty, illness, loss, the pain of an unhealed marriage, the fear of family violence, the endless expectations others impose on us, trusted institutions, like some corporations or the Church, that fail to be compassionate and sometimes betray our trust. Then there are the hurts that don't heal, anger that won't go away, success that's always just beyond our reach. We can be a burden to others; and they, to us.

The third burden we carry is deepest of all, although not always obvious as we tend to suppress it. This is the burden of identity: who am I, really? What core remains when all the shifting sands of time empty out? Beneath the cosmetics, the facade, the tyranny of fashion and wannabees, who am I? All during our lives we try to answer that question.

The first answer we often come up with, because the culture tells us so, is "I am what I do." In its own way, this is very true. When I do good things and have a little success in. life, I feel good about myself. But when I fail or get old or sick or down-sized and can't do what I used to do, I start feeling low or depressed and wonder, now that I am no longer what I did, who am I?

Or we might say, "I am what other people say about me." This is a

very powerful thought; in fact, it is sometimes most important. When people speak well of you, you can walk around quite freely. But when somebody starts saying negative things about you, you might start feeling sad and having doubts about yourself. You might try on other false identities hoping to please others and reclaim their favourable comments. But by so doing, you forfeit your true identity.

Finally, you might also say, "I am what I have." For example, I am a Canadian with kind parents, a good education, good health, and tons of clothes, furniture, and a car. But as soon as I lose any of it, if a family member dies or my health goes or I lose the property I have, then I can slip into inner darkness and feel I am nobody. And, in fact, if I lose all I have, I become an unnoticed has-been with no face, and the society which once idolized me evaporates.

Nevertheless, we put a lot of energy into maintaining our beliefs that "I am what I do," "I am what others say about me," "I am what I have." And you know, when that's the case, our life quickly becomes a repetitive up and down motion. Because when people speak well about us, and when we do good things and have a lot, we are quite "up" and excited. But when we start losing, when suddenly we find out that we can't do anything anymore, when we find out that people are talking against us, when we lose our friends, we might slip into depression, feel very low, and become something of non-persons.

And before you realize it, we are on a zigzag, up and down, up and down. That's why most of our work and our mental energy goes toward trying to stay above the line, and we call that surviving. We want to hold on to our good name, hold on to some good work, hold on to our property; but we know that in the end there is the reality that says we are going to die after all. We're going to lose it all. You know, when you live this kind of life, with all these ups and downs, the end is death. And when you are dead, you're dead. Nobody talks about you anymore; you don't have anything anymore; you can't do anything anymore. You lose it all. That little life of yours and mine has come to nothing. And that means we are nothing.

What I want to say to you this weekend is that this whole thing is wrong: That is not who you are, and it is not who I am. That is what the demon said to Jesus when he went to the desert: "Turn the stones into bread, and show the world that you can do something." "Jump from the temple, and let people catch you, so they speak well of you." "Kneel in front of me, and I will give you a lot of possessions. Then you will be loved by everybody, and you will know who you are." But Jesus says, "That is a lie. I already know who I am because before the Spirit sent me to be tempted by you, the Spirit came upon me and said to me, "You are the beloved Child. You are my beloved Son. On you my favour rests."

This truth was the basic identity that Jesus clung to as he lived his life with its ups and downs. People praised him, and people rejected him, and people said, "Hosanna," and people said, "Crucify him." It made no difference; Jesus held on to the core truth. "Whatever happens, I am the beloved of God, and that is who I am and will always be. That truth allows me to live in a world that keeps rejecting me or praising me or laughing at me or spitting on me. I am the beloved. Not because people say I'm great, but because my Father says so. He has forever called me Beloved."

Dear friends, if there is anything that I want you to hear this weekend, it is that what is said of Jesus is also said of you: you are the beloved daughter or son of God. That is your core identity. And you must hear this truth not only in your head but in your gut, hear it so that your whole life can be turned around. You must cling to the truth, the joy, the conviction that you are the beloved sons and daughters of God before, during, and after all the burdens of life. That is the one unchangeable reality in your lives. Therefore, every time that you are tempted to despair, become bitter or jealous, or lash out; every time you feel rejected—in fact, **are** rejected—or laughed at or made fun of or passed over, say, "No matter what happens to me, I am the beloved son the beloved daughter of God."

Remember this story? The line at the airport was long, the crowd pressing. The man at the head of the line was furious: "I want to be seated now! I can't wait in this line. I've got first-class tickets," he screamed. He

went on and on. The attendant behind the counter was patiently trying to explain the problems to him, but he would have none of it. Finally he shouted, "Do you know who I am?" Immediately, the sharp-witted attendant picked up the microphone and announced: "Attention, we have a gentleman here who doesn't know who he is. If anyone can identify this man, please come to the front desk."

We laugh and take pleasure in his comeuppance; but here is a man who has all his identity wrapped up in what he does, what people say about him, and what he possesses. When these are threatened, he cries out in pain, for what is left when this material identity is challenged or gone? What is left, if he but knew it, is that he is Beloved.

Deacon Gerry

