

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, August 4, 2019, Year C

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 12:13-21

"Look for His Fingerprints"

Today's Gospel, like so many, is all about having a relationship with Jesus. How incredible it is that without Jesus there can be no answers – but with Jesus there can be no questions. Think about that! This is where personal inner strength and faith, along with a personal relationship with Jesus Christ can make all the difference. He truly wants us to spend time with Him and trust in Him, it can be as simple as "help me Jesus."

When we bring our problems, needs and concerns to God in prayer, He answers in many ways - possibly showing us how we need to change and grow in our attitude and behavior toward the issue at hand. It is said that God answers prayers in three way: yes, no and not now. We need to be mindful of that. He is always listening – if we are speaking, but we also need to be listening as well. It is so effective to know that God helps us trace God's hand in our lives. In the last 17 plus years that I have been blessed to write sermons - the Lord has given me an insight I have often used and I find it to be so true: "when we look in the rear-view mirror of our lives – we can see God's fingerprints all over everything." There is not one thing that has happened in your life that has not been guided, blessed and protected by God Himself.

In today's Holy Gospel reading from Luke, Jesus refuses to sit in as judge for this man and his brother because He refuses to participate in satisfying the greed that He senses that prompted the request. Instead of helping the man to get his inheritance – Jesus points him to a different understanding of life. Jesus wants him to understand that life is not to be valued in terms of wealth and possessions, but instead true blessings come to those who hear the Word of God and more importantly, who do it. Jesus instills His people to think beyond earthbound goals and to use what they have been given for God's kingdom - faith, service, and obedience.

You know I spoke just a few minutes ago in our prayer about King Solomon. He was given everything could possibly be given to a person, yet he blew it! He blew it and history tells us that he was disobedient, and so he lost it. It is a matter of using the gifts that God gives. What is the old saying: 'use it or you lose it.' That was really true for Solomon.

The verses immediately following today's Holy Gospel from Luke shows Jesus instructing the people and us that worrying is a waste of time. He says, "*Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear.*" (Luke 12:22) "*Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!*" (Luke 12:25-28)

Jesus clearly indicates that humanity has faced the very same problem – it is the A word - anxiety. We have all fallen victim to anxiety, maybe it was to get your driver's license, maybe

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we had difficulty with what we used to call the K-turn and now is the 3-point turn? I don't know what it might be – maybe it is to get your license as a PA, all of these different things that fall into our lives that we get the A word, and worry about. I remember when I was a senior in seminary – we had to take the GOE's – the General Ordination Exam. When it was all done, the bishop, at that time, said to me “you survived ‘ecclesial hazing.’ Ecclesial means church. So basically it was like – Ok, you got through it – now we will ordain you. Wow! The anxiety of all these 28 seniors in the Class of 2005 from Trinity School for Ministry, we were tightly wound, so what did they do? They sent each of us a tin of the world's best cookies. Chocolate chip cookies – helped the anxiety – but it was over! Sometimes we put ourselves through the mill, and for no reason at all! Aaaahhh! Jesus warns that stressing and worrying cannot change the situation – and it won't help you to help you to live a long and happy life. They say that stress is a silent killer!

A lot of the people listening to Jesus barely had enough to live on, and they worried that one day all of what they had would be gone. Jesus made it clear about not worrying over food and clothing. Stress and worry can make you very ill and ‘worrying about worrying,’ will only make it worse. My wife used to call me a ‘worry wart’ but God changed that along the way. My Mom's favorite song was “Don't Worry, Be Happy.” Do you remember that? It drove me nuts. It was all she played, and all she sang. It was like OK Mom, I get it, I get it.

What Jesus says here goes right to the heart of people's behavior. He gets right down to the roots of the problem. The man who wanted Jesus to arbitrate in his dispute with his brother was so typical in his attitude, and especially about the Land that God gave to their ancestors. The Land was their inheritance from Almighty God – for all generations. If you have any questions about who owns the Land in the Middle East - look at Genesis chapter 12, verse 7 “*The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.*” In Genesis 15 God made promises to Abram that that Land would be his for generations to come, all generation to come – all through Isaac, his promised son! God made a binding contract, a contract that He did not expect Abram and his people to keep, this was a contract that God was going to keep, a covenant with Abram. You may have heard how God commanded Abram to spilt certain animals and how God made Abram fall asleep so He could walk through the animals as a means of keeping that contract. Listen to these words from Genesis 15:18-21 in which God said to Abram, “*To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates-- the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites.*” Excuse me – but you either believe what God said – or you don't. This Land of Israel, the Promised Land (we are not talking about Lebanon, or Egypt, but we are talking about Israel, the Land that was given by God and cannot be taken away or claimed, illegitimately, by others. Do you hear what I am saying? In the world today we keep hearing about a group of people who are claiming that Land. Ah, read the Bible? Genesis – God gave that Land and it cannot be taken away.

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Families clung to their inheritance for religious reasons as well as economic ones. It is important for us to understand what the Mosaic Law says about inheritance: the elder brother would receive a double portion of the father's ownings - an inheritance. If the father had no sons - his possessions were to be divided among his daughters, BUT his daughters were then required to marry within their father's tribe so that his possessions would not leave his tribe. Inheritance was their way of life - their existence for now and in the future. You can see the reason why this man was so insistent about his inheritance, and getting his share with his brother. You only need to listen to the parable of the prodigal son, who wanted his inheritance before his father died and then he went out and squandered it. The older brother was all upset when he came back. It is all about inheritance and it is in the Bible.

Jesus, Himself, was longing to shower grace and new life on people of every race and place. Israel, as far as He could see, was in danger of becoming like the man in this account who wanted the security of enough possessions to last a long time. Jesus wanted these people to understand that:

- Life isn't like that.
- The kingdom of God isn't like that.
- The kingdom of God is, at its very heart, about God's majesty sweeping the world with love and power, so that everyone, made in God's image and each one loved beyond belief, may relax in the knowledge that God is in control.

All we need to do is trust Him. It is a hard word, trust. A four lettered word - trust, like love.

When Jesus points to the birds and the flowers He wants people to understand that God, the Creator, loves to give good gifts, loves to give you the kingdom - loves, that is, to bring His loving care and rescue right into your life. Do you know the words Savior and salvation? Do you know what that really means? Rescue - to be rescued from what we deserve. If God is the Father, who calls you His child, why do we have such a hard time trusting Him? Why do we let stress 'beat us up' and rob us of the joy that comes with a happy and blessed life? God wants you to call Him - to guide you from the pit you have dug for yourself - and let Him lift you up and out, and give you a new way of coping, a new way of trusting.

In closing, I want to share with you what Jesus said later in that very conversation: "*Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!*" (Luke 12:24-28) It is mindboggling to think that God has so much covered - but many just can't trust Him like the birds and the lilies do. Are we that bad as control freaks that we have to always drive the bus? We always have to have the steering wheel; we always have to have the gas. How many of us sitting in the passenger seat have their own brake

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pedal? You might not be trying to steer; you might be bracing yourself, when there is really not need to brace yourself, but tap, tap, tap – hit that brake pedal! We are human, we are really human.

God wants us to trust in Him, to call on Him, and to rely on Him to take the stress and the worry from us. The Apostle James, Jesus' brother, gave us great insight with these words: *“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”* (James 1:17) Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and tomorrow. God wants your troubles, your worries, and most of all – He wants your love. Do you know what Jesus always said after He rose from the dead? Whenever He greeted people? *“Peace be with you!”* Not stress and troubles, but He wanted you to receive the peace that surpasses all understanding. God wants your troubles; He wants your worries and most of all He wants your love. Let Him who gives us life eternal remove the stress from you and from me. Let us do one thing today, if we do nothing else, look for His fingerprints.