

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, July 31, 2016, Year C

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 12:13-21

“Stress – the Silent Killer”

Today's Gospel is not just about planning – but it is about having a relationship with our 'solid rock' – Jesus. I am sure you have heard the old adage: 'the best laid plans of mice and men' from Scottish Poet Robert Burns? No matter how well we plan – something usually goes awry, you know – Murphy visits - you know 'Murphy's Law' if anything can go wrong it will go wrong. It is how we deal with the sudden curves that are thrown our way that makes the real difference. I have unfortunately seen people fall apart when the stress becomes too much. For them no amount of planning seems to help – for it is their attitude and outlook that causes them the stress. Please don't get me wrong – planning is so very important, (that is why on the 8th day God created Vestries (tongue in cheek)) especially having alternative plans for the 'just in case' situations that may arise. Having the maturity, experience and resources ready can make all the difference. There are some situations however where plans are made fool heartedly – without the maturity, experience and wisdom to deal with those unexpected stress filled situations that try to throw you off course. This is where personal inner strength and faith, along with a personal relationship with Jesus Christ can make all the difference. You may have heard me and other people say – “there is nothing that Jesus and I can't handle – together!” I for one truly believe that.

Those who really want stress relief need to look to God for their security – not to just their own ability. When we bring problems to God in prayer, He often answers – showing us how we need to change and grow in our attitude toward the problem. This answer is often not the one we were looking for, but it is more effective in helping us trace God's hand in our lives. In the last 11 plus years that I have been blessed to write sermons the Lord has given me a line that I have often used and I find it so true: “when we look in the rear view mirror of our lives – we can see God's fingerprints all over everything.”

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

It is no coincidence that the verses immediately following today's Holy Gospel from Luke show Jesus facing the issue of stress and worry straight on: “*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*

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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' warnings indicate that much of the world at least, for a great deal of human history, has faced the very same problem. The difference, though, is the level at which anxiety strikes. Take it from me – one who my wife used to call 'a worry wart' - that anxiety is foolishness and life is far more than what we eat or wear, or drive. Let's face it – stressing and worrying cannot change the situation – nor will it help you to live a long and happy life – instead it silently steals time from your life and robs you of happiness. Stress is the silent killer!

Many of Jesus' hearers only just barely had enough to live on, and there was always the prospect that one day they wouldn't have even that. Most of them would have perhaps one spare change of clothes, but not much more. As with many in today's non-Western world, one disaster – the family breadwinner being sick or injured, for example – could mean instant impoverishment. And it was to people just like that, that Jesus gave His clear and striking commands about not worrying over food and clothing. We now know that anxiety itself can be a killer. Stress and worry can cause disease, or certainly contribute to it – producing the enchanting prospect of people 'worrying about worrying,' a downward spiral that maybe only a good sense of humor might break.

What Jesus says here goes right to the heart of the way that people are. His warnings and commands go much deeper, right down to the roots of the problem Jesus faced in confronting His contemporaries with the message about God's kingdom.

- This wasn't just good advice on how to live a happy, carefree life.
- This was a challenge to the very center of His world.

The man who wanted Jesus to arbitrate in a property dispute with his brother was so typical in his attitude, the attitude that many of Jesus' fellow-Jews who looked towards the Land that they lived in itself. The Land wasn't just where they happened to live; in the first century, just as today in the 21st, possession of the Land was not just a most vital Jewish symbol, but their inheritance from Almighty God. We only need to go back to Genesis chapter 12 and look at the promises, and Genesis 15, where God made promises to Abraham that that Land would be his for generations to come – all through Isaac, his promised son! 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. I think this is helpful for us to understand why this man was so insistent about his inheritance, and getting his share with his brother.

Here was Jesus coming with this message that God was changing all of that. He wasn't tightening up Israel's defense of the Land or overcoming the Romans; instead - Jesus was

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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 him a long time. Societies and individuals can think themselves into this false position, to which the short answer is God's answer:

- 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 human beings, each one, made in God's image and each one loved beyond belief, may relax in the knowledge that God is in control.

Reflecting on the birds and the flowers is meant to stimulate serious understanding: 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. If God is the Father who calls you His child, what is to stop you trusting him? Why do you let stress 'beat you up' and rob you of a happy and blessed life? The Lord wants you to call Him to guide you from the ditch you have driven yourself into – and let Him give you not only a 'tow out' but a new way of coping.

The fact is that Jesus is returning and will be sharing with us the inheritance that is given to all believers in Him. When Jesus speaks of 'treasure in heaven,' here and elsewhere, this doesn't mean treasure that you will only possess after death. 'Heaven' is God's province of created reality – His Kingdom - which, as the 'Lord's Prayer' tells us, will one day come just as it is in the heavenly realm. What matters is that the Kingdom of God is bringing the values and priorities of God Himself to stand against the greed, stress and anxiety of the world. God made us in His image and likeness – and He does not want us to go through this life alone – He wants us to call on His wisdom, His compassion, and His love to help carry us through.

I want to tell you that I am very proud of our Vestry. Our Vestry made a decision last year, when it was time to make a budget that they were going to go with a 'faith budget.' We were going to go on a 'faith budget,' knowing that God would provide! That is a BIG step, my brothers and sisters. From a time where every little thing was written down, but oh, they are still written down, Don, God bless him keeps track of everything. Rather than have people make a decision and write down a number – we are asking this Parish to ask God! We are to ask God to help us in everything- to make right choices. George Blampied was in my office this morning, and the conversation he capped off when he said that in this election "why don't we just pray for God's person to be elected." That is very wise. We need to rely on God for all things. You see when we try to do it all by our self, not only will we fall, but the weight of what we are trying to carry will crush us.

At the moment that Jesus died on the cross – the veil of the Temple that was the barrier that separated the altar area from the Holy of Holies – tore in two. Matthew 27:50-51 records that event: *"And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and*

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the rocks split.” This curtain was about as thick as a man’s hand – impossible to a human to tear – and notice it was torn from top to bottom – and not bottom to top, not torn by man but meaning that God Himself tore the veil and not anyone else. The barrier between God and man had now been removed – giving mankind access to God’s Holy Spirit – and also meaning that we never have to ‘go it alone.’ 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 gave us this insight: “*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) God wants your troubles, your worries, and your love. Do you know what Jesus always said after He rose from the dead? Whenever He greeted people, what did He say? “*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 from you ‘stress – the silent killer!’