

Squamish United Church
Rev. Karen Millard
Thanksgiving Sunday

October 7, 2018

Scriptures:
Matthew 6:25-33

Grateful

Worry may be the signature human condition, and its attendant anxiety the characteristic mark of our time. In 2013 it was recorded 11% percent of the Canadian population suffer from some form of debilitating anxiety. I was not successful in getting a concrete percentage for 2018 but my assumption is it is higher.

After all, too many people – intelligent, skillful people – are out of work, or work jobs that do not pay enough to live comfortable in this economic climate, money and viable options to care for themselves and their families. “Lack” is a dominant word in our culture and is cause for tremendous and justifiable worry. Higher education, once an expectation, is becoming an impossible dream of for many of our youth. Even after they spend money on it they cannot find jobs in their fields. And then there is the despair that accompanies these concerns, which taxes the budget even more because it gives rise to medical problems – problems that increase anxiety that our healthcare system is not on top of addressing (although admittedly much better than many countries - and for that we give thanks).

“In today’s gospel, Jesus admonishes us not to worry about our life. How does that help? Doesn’t reading these words heap guilt on we who are worried for worrying? Aren’t Jesus’ words the romantic musings of a young idealist, insensitive to the poor, the unemployed and especially to the worrywarts? At first glance, his advice does not seem very practical or doable.

Or does it?

Protestant theologian Paul Tillich characterized the most predominant modern anxiety as spiritual; that is, we suffer from emptiness or meaninglessness. If Tillich is the diagnostician, then perhaps the Jesuit theologian Anthony de Mello, following Jesus’ advice, offers the cure. De Mello said, “You sanctify whatever you are grateful for.” In other words, instead of nursing our worries, change the focus. Look elsewhere, beyond self-absorption. Cultivate a grateful heart. The ease of this cure is what makes it seem unrealistic. Do you remember the Old Testament story of Naaman, the commander of the army of the king of Aram, found in Second Kings? He sought out the prophet Elisha to heal him of his leprosy but when Elisha instructed Naaman to wash in the Jordan seven times, Naaman became angry. The cure was too easy! When at last Naaman followed Elisha’s instructions, his flesh was restored to that of a young man.”¹

On the other hand an amazing example of Gratitude, perspective and thanksgiving over the last years has come from Rainer and Joanna Schwatz. There is no question that they have had real issues to worry about - more than I personally can imagine handling. I would be lying if I said I never saw them worry and there is no judgment for the few anxious times I witnessed. Still they

¹ <http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/stw/2012/11/07/thanksgiving-day-b-november-24-2012/>

have taught me so much as I have witnessed them carry what life has dealt them with grace and dignity choosing to fight despair at its core. They made a conscious effort to live ‘extraordinary lives.’

“Gratitude does not come easily, especially when we are caught in the grip of anxiety. Nor does gratitude come in a sudden conversion. It comes through a slow turning away from worry by intentionally stopping to find something, anything, for which to thank God. In the midst of worry, it can be a real stretch. Jesus understood this. Take something simple and common, Jesus says, for which to give thanks: a bird, a flower, a blade of grass. Anything will do: a breath of air, a dog’s loyalty, a glass of water. It is the small step of moving out of self to notice something or someone beyond the self that matters.

This small step leads to huge results. It leads to finally getting what Jesus is trying to tell us: everything is God’s, and God is eagerly waiting to give us more and more – if only we would allow it. Jesus wants us to notice what is in front of us, to believe that God is present and to be thankful. Change the subject, Jesus admonishes. There is a lot of stuff in life we are powerless to change, but changing the subject is always in our power.”

I take this message seriously that is why almost every morning I sit down with my gratitude journal and write down three things I am grateful for and also why every night as I tuck my girls into bed I ask them what they are grateful for. Often it is simply a list of family members for the girls but from time to time they take notice of someone new who has blessed them, or an activity that made their day. My hope is that this will install in them grateful hearts because I have learned that we have a choice in life we can live life with a sense of abundance or live with a sense of never enough.

The Serenity Prayer, by theologian Reinhold Niebuhr is familiar to many of us because it reminds us of how to live in gratitude.

“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

“By adopting gratitude, we can discover God’s abundance. It’s a funny thing, but gratitude takes math out of the equation. When gratitude replaces anxiety, even when we find we have less than we had during our worry days, gratitude reveals that we have far more than we need.

Look at the birds of the air, consider the lilies of the field. Jesus wasn’t being idealistic; he was being practical. Medical science has shown that by not worrying, we can add to our life span. We don’t have to worry about our lives day to day – what we are going to eat or drink or wear? Nor do we have to worry about our children’s needs. All we have to do is say thank you, knowing that what needs to happen will, and the rest is not all that important. Gratitude is the secret.”²

I wanted to take a moment to celebrate with thanksgiving where this congregation has come in the last year. We had our first service here October 1, 2017. Congratulations on a year of Squamish United Church a@ Centrepoint. Here is a little video to share. Always remember if you take photos of other events send them my way otherwise it is hard for me to put them into our materials. Lets be Grateful.

² IBID

