

June 24, 2018  
5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pentecost

# Sermons

from The Church of the Covenant

“Enough for Today”

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Note: During our summer series, "Word," members of the Covenant family will choose a scripture passage and share how it has been or become God's Word for them.

Matthew 6:25-26

25 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

Reflections by Nick Tomko

I graduated from Eastern Kentucky University; I had been attending First Presbyterian Church in Richmond, KY thanks to Erin, my future wife, and her grandmother who has grown up in that church. First Pres had recently gotten a new student minister, Joel Stanley, and as a graduation gift he gave us this little book titled, "God's Promises for Graduates." In it is a table of contents that lists numerous reasons why people turn to God. I, like many other Christians, turn to God and the Bible as a last resort after we have tried working harder or blaming someone or something for our situations.

For example, I often turn to a section titled, "What to do when you feel anxiety and worry" because there are so many responsibilities to juggle and so much pressure on me. Graduate students constantly compare ourselves to our peers and our mentors which leads to self-doubt and a feeling that we don't belong which we call the imposter syndrome. We, as students, ultimately worry about our accomplishments and accolades and how that will affect our job prospects. In addition to this anxiety, money was a frequent stressor in mine and Erin's relationship. In both of these situations, I tried to work harder to resolve the anxiety, but no matter how much time and effort I put in, the anxiety didn't dissipate.

Next came the blame, I blamed myself, my wife, my peers and my mentors. This turned my anxiety into anger which still didn't dissipate the anxiety and stress. Added to these personal situations was the anxiety of my wife experiencing pain every single day. She had developed pain in her heel that left her unable to walk without pain. The doctors tried numerous treatments before considering surgery, but none of them were successful. The anxiety culminated

with the worry about the leadership and the direction of our nation and government which threatens to rip us apart. Many of us throughout the nation, construe our brothers and sisters of the opposing party to be our combatants without empathizing with their own experiences and situations.

Then, I went to my book, "God's Promises for Graduates" and read the scripture today. This directed me back to God and the Bible, and my anxiety began to dissipate. Erin and I found Dave Ramsey's Financial Peace University through CotC which was taught by Will and Susan Kline. This course incorporated God and money which aligned our interests and established clear steps. I stopped worrying about comparing my accomplishments and accolades to my peers because I'm successful in my own way and God will provide a path for me even though I can't discern it. God provided for my wife by giving her a wonderful doctor, a successful surgery, and a effective recovery. Finally, this scripture reminded me not to judge people but empathize. We are all struggling with anxiety and worry which affects our interpersonal relationships positively and negatively. Maybe they, too are just overwhelmed with anxiety.

## *Enough for Today*

Corrie ten Boom once said, "Worrying is carrying tomorrow's load with today's strength- carrying two days at once. Worrying doesn't empty tomorrow of its sorrow; it empties today of its strength."

Several studies conducted over the last ten years have uncovered an emerging reality: Americans that are currently in their teens through early thirties suffer from stress and anxiety at a higher rate than any other generation that has gone before them. More than those who came of age in the years immediately following 9-11. More than those who came of age during the Vietnam War and Civil Rights Era. Even more than those who came of age during Great Depression.

It is a wild world out there for a young person just trying to figure out how life is supposed to work. This is an age when a bewildering array of options always seems readily available, yet social and economic peril feel like constant threats. There is demand from peers and strangers to display our most exciting, most successful, and most attractive selves to the world at every moment, yet geographical distance often severs ties to actual, living and breathing communities of family and friends. The social technologies that promised to link us together and keep us connected have often served to isolate us and fill us with self-doubt.

The Millennial generation is certainly not the only ones feeling the pressure. There are many things about our cultural landscape that fill us all with anxiety, some for a very good reason, and many others for no good reason at all.

This truth can make it difficult for us as 21st century Christians to hear the Good News in today's reading from Matthew. Birds of the air don't have mortgages. They don't have to pay for childcare. Lilies of the field don't need a five-year plan. They won't be here in five years, and in a way, we might admit we're a little jealous of them.

Yet, Jesus is making an important point in these verses, one he returns to repeatedly throughout this chapter. As he teaches the disciples to pray, as he reminds them of the lilies of the field and birds of the air, what he is really telling us is that this is enough. Every moment of every day brings with it enough blessing and enough challenge. And this moment that we are living right now is all we've really been promised. Tomorrow does not even exist, and may never come.

It can be difficult to live that way, of course, in a world that is always enticing us to look beyond the horizon. We are told that we must look ahead, think ahead, and plan out our futures, and these practices have their value. But the message these practices give us is that we are in control – that somehow if we obsess enough about what will happen tomorrow, we will be able to govern every possible outcome. But that is not reality, for any of us. We are not in control, and the good news is that we don't have to live like we are. This is the message of the Gospel. When we can live here and now, understanding that there are things we do not know, and cannot change, we are often surprised to find that God provides what we need for this moment we are in, even if it's only the strength to take another breath and let it go.

It is when we begin to live the next moment, and the next one, before we are ready for them that our minds and our spirits become overwhelmed with the burden of carrying more than they can bear, more than God has provided for.

In the Old Testament story of the Exodus, when the people of God had escaped bondage in Egypt and were stranded in the wilderness with no food and no hope, God made bread to rain down from the sky to meet the people's needs for daily nourishment. God gave strict instructions that each family gather only what they need for that day's food. Those who disregarded these instructions were surprised and dismayed to find that the extra food they had stored away for the morning, just in case God's promised provisions failed to materialize, had become rotten and worm-filled overnight. They were forced to begin again, each morning, with a new promise that this day, this moment, they would have enough.

Sometimes in the most anxious moments in our lives are spent worrying about things that will not be resolved today. Christ reminds us that what we have at this moment is enough for now. From the beginning, God has promised to give us just that: enough for today. As we open our hearts and minds to this truth, we often find that when the time is right, we know it. Answers become clear, a way is made out of no way, or we know what we must do. We find that God provides us with exactly what we need to survive, to move forward, to go on.

Thanks be to God. Amen

Prayer:

God of yesterday, today, and tomorrow,

In spite of all the worries and anxieties that we carried with us into this place today, we are grateful for this opportunity to remember:

to remember that you have promised to comfort and support us and to help us bear our burdens

to remember that you are not a God who remains distant from your creation, but one who has chosen to be intimately involved with us, even to the point of experiencing for yourself the depth of our suffering and sorrows

to remember our shared identity as your beloved children

For all this, we give you thanks as we take this time to allow the Holy Spirit to breathe in us and through us and among us, reminding us how you bind us together as one and call us to care for and support one another. Help us to set aside the pride that prevents us from being honest and vulnerable with all we carry.

God of love and mercy, we lift up to you everything in our lives and in our world that weighs on us. Our hearts and souls are pained by the pictures and descriptions of families separated at the border and by the responsibility we all bear for the actions of our government. We pray for children who are traumatized and afraid as they navigate a strange country without their parents, and we pray for parents who are distraught and enraged because they do not know where their children are. With all of your creative powers, God, give us the capacity and creativity and intelligence to find solutions to the complex challenges of immigration.

Teach us how to follow your commands to welcome strangers and tend to those in distress even as we remember how you have welcomed us into your own heart. We pray courage and empathy for our leaders and for those whose job it is to enforce policies. May we take comfort in the promise that you hold all of us – every country, every person, every parent, and child, in your hand, and that no earthly leader can ever have more power than you.

We also pray for the ongoing issue of gun violence and for those in our country and in our community whose lives have been forever changed by the trajectory of a bullet. For the young people who turn to violence as a way of trying to wring power and control from situations that feel hopeless, for innocent victims caught in the crossfire, and for those mourning the loss of their loved ones and grappling with the senselessness of untimely death. Send your Spirit into all

these places of trauma and sorrow and worry God, and send us as well, that we may be bearers of peace and healing where it is most needed.

Gracious God, when we are confronted with all of these challenges, our own worries can feel insignificant, and yet, to us, they are not. Worries about our relationships, our jobs, our health, our finances can easily overwhelm us. Teach us, O God, how to hold our worries lightly and how to entrust them to you. Show us how to discern what we can do today to draw our thoughts and actions more in line with your will, knowing that tomorrow we will have the opportunity to try again.

Even as we struggle to believe that, in Christ, all that we are and all that we have is truly enough for today, may we take comfort in the promise that we do not bear our burdens alone, but within this community, we help each other share our load. As we join our voices together, may we recognize the gift and the power of community, voicing aloud the prayer Jesus taught us was, indeed, enough, saying, Our Father...