

Today

1st Timothy 2:1-7

Matthew 6:25-33

There's a story I love, especially at this time of year, about a little girl whose family had invited many guests for Thanksgiving dinner. As they gathered around the dinner table, the father invited their youngest child, a little girl of about five, to say grace. But she played shy, and she was very reluctant to pray before all these people, and so she asked, "But what will I say, Daddy?" "Just what you hear Mommy say," he replied. And so the little girl raised her eyes toward heaven, threw up her arms, and said, "Lord, why did I invite so many guests for dinner?"

On this Thanksgiving Sunday, there are probably some among us who identify with that mother and her stress as she prepares dinner, and perhaps there are some who are not among us this morning because they are presently preparing for their guests. We are indoctrinated about what to expect for thanksgiving, and we come prepared to reflect about that for which we are thankful. But a colleague of mine pointed out that mostly we think of things during this past year (if we can remember that far back) that have been a cause for thanksgiving. Or, sometimes, we look forward to things we anticipate, that prompt a sense of thanksgiving. And yet, the prompt of thanksgiving is not really about the past or about the future, it is about now.

Those things for which we are thankful tell a lot about us because they reflect our awareness of how richly our lives are

blessed, and they show just what is important to us.

We live in one of the wealthiest nations in the world, enjoy a standard of living beyond the imagining of many people in other nations, take peace and security for granted, have money in the bank to a varying degree, and have more than enough to eat. But most of us, even as we pause to give thanks, are very aware of the many things that we worry about.

I've been pondering this passage for a full week, so I have a slight advantage here. I read the passage from Matthew, a passage specifically chosen for Thanksgiving Sunday, and wondered. In fact, I did a lot more than wonder – I struggled. I read: “Look at the birds: they do not plant seeds, gather a harvest and put it in barns; yet your Father in heaven takes care of them! Aren't you worth much more than birds?” And I spent a lot of time reading and re-reading and asking myself: “So where's the Good News?” It sounds great to say look at the birds, or look at the wild flowers, but reality is something else. I started thinking about this passage before the Tuesday night meeting of United churches, and wondered, where's the good news for churches who feel that they are in dire straits? What does this passage say to them? And, since I was driving a fair distance at the start of the week, I looked at the fields that are being harvested, and thought of my friend who is a retired farmer, who has told me that his retirement fund, since he was operating a family farm and just making a living, was his dairy quota which he sold at the time of his retirement, and invested in the hopes that it would support his wife

and himself for the rest of their lives. The economic “mess” of the fall has surely frightened him about what lies ahead, and I know that he is not alone. Over and over we hear about what people have lost from their retirement funds. Or we look at Samoa, Indonesia, and the Philippines, and the devastation that has been wrought there. Or we look at Afghanistan with all of its struggles, or the Middle East with the ongoing tension and violence. It’s hard to find the good news when so much of our world seems to be in chaos.

So then I asked myself, “what were the conditions for the people in Jesus’ day? Would it have been easier for them to find the good news? Their reality would indeed prompt us to give thanks today. Most of his hearers earned only a daily wage. They didn’t have funds invested. They didn’t have anything to invest! If they were lucky, they earned enough each day to keep their family fed. They didn’t have closets full of clothes or freezers or cupboards full of supplies. They understood, perhaps more readily than we do, that each day brought enough challenges for that day, that it might feel overwhelming to try to look ahead, to worry about the future might hold. Imagine a world with no social safety net, no free access to medical care, no old age security pension

On this Thanksgiving Sunday, it is perhaps, after all, a remarkably appropriate passage for us. For rich as we are, blessed as we are, we are also among the most stressed people in the world. Most of us only question **what** our next meal will be, not if it will be. Our biggest decision about clothing is to decide what we will wear, not

whether or not there is something to wear. But we worry. We worry about whether we will have enough money to last us until we die. We worry about the inheritance we will leave our children. We worry about the cost of maintaining this building and our ability to continue to pay the bills, to keep the doors open. If we spent half as much time worrying about how faithfully we reflect the message of wonderful news, and how it has shaped our lives, our hopes and our dreams, then we would know that the future of the building isn't nearly as important as the future of our faith.

That doesn't mean that there are not challenges before this congregation. There are. And like the rest of you, I like to eat, and to have a roof over my head, and so I have an interest in all the aspects of the well-being of this congregation.

The irony is that even in our desperation, we really aren't broke. We carry no mortgage. Our only debt is to ourselves, as we borrow funds from one account to meet the demands upon another. And even if we finish this year in a deficit position, we have assets that we can use to meet the shortfall. It's quite true that we cannot continue to do this forever. We will ultimately run out of money, and right now we're running through it at an alarming rate. But if our only concern is our building, then there is no reason for us to continue.

Because the church is not bricks and mortar. The church is us. And we are gathered here in Christ's name to celebrate the gift of our faith, and to equip ourselves to share that faith with others. Jesus didn't tell us to go out into the world and build beautiful buildings and

devote ourselves to maintaining them. Jesus told us to go out into the world and make disciples, to share with others the knowledge and love of God, that they too might come to know their Creator and live their lives in a wonderful, enriching relationship with their God.

The whole point of the bricks and mortar is to provide us with a location to become nurtured and enriched, and to provide our community with a place where they can come aside and rest, and share, and be nourished in a faith which may as yet be unknown to them.

We do need to address the challenges of our buildings, and our physical presence in the city of Windsor, but as one gentleman from one of the other United Churches said on Tuesday: "I'm not here to find ways of saving money or of balancing budgets. I'm here so that we can find ways to more faithfully be the church in today's world. So that we can be disciples and minister to the world around us."

The United Churches in this city reflect the circumstances of so many of our lives. We look at the world and we look at our resources, and we wonder, or we worry. But in our worry we sap the joy from the day, the beauty from our world, and change nothing. One of my colleagues tossed out a quotation that has stayed with me: Worry is like paying interest on a loan you haven't taken out yet. Or worry is paying interest on a loan that's not yet due. Too often we worry about what might be, instead of addressing ourselves to today, to its challenges, its promises, and its joys. And as Jesus has so aptly pointed out: Can any of us live a bit longer by worrying? Can we

change the future by worrying? Of course not. We change the future by fully embracing today, and living today in confidence and faith.

In our lives we come to many crossroads. The Windsor churches are approaching one. Many of us are approaching others in our personal lives. And the word from our Gospel lesson is the invitation to trust and have faith. It's so easy to say: "Don't worry." But such injunctions seldom work. So instead, listen to our Saviour who invites you to look at the world with wide open eyes, to embrace it with wonder, to invest your whole being in living today, addressing the challenges of this day, loving those around you and making sure they know how much they mean to you and how important they are, living in confidence that God is with us throughout this day, and throughout each one that may follow.

It's a challenge to everything our world tells us. And yet, it is a way filled with wisdom, with confidence, and with delight. For then we will not let future worries deprive us of today's joy and fulness. So, on your way home and even at home, listen to the words from the Gospel, and look, truly look, at the birds, at the flowers, at all of those around you, or at photos of those who are far away, and observe the fulness of the world around you, and remember the one who has created and is still creating today, and give thanks. For we are assured that God is with us in it all, and that all we truly need is to rejoice in today. Thanks be to God. Amen