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*Matthew 6:24-34*

*2 Pentecost / Year A / Proper 3*

*25 May 2008*

*Preached by the Rev. David Fredrickson*

There is a story I heard recently of a man seen fleeing down the hall of a hospital with a gown on. Apparently he was just about to go into surgery. A security guard stopped him before he could leave the building and asked him, "What's the matter?" The man said, "I heard the nurse say, 'It's a very simple operation, don't worry, I'm sure everything will be all right.'" "She was just trying to comfort you," the security guard replied, "What's so frightening about that?" "She wasn't talking to me," exclaimed the man, "She was talking to the surgeon."<sup>i</sup>

This joke sounds a bit like a stress dream to me, do you have those? Fortunately, I don't seem to have stress dreams anymore. When I was a child, however, I used to run in my sleep. What I was running from, I don't recall, but I would wake up in a sweat with my blankets on the floor. I remember my sister-in-law telling me that when my brother was in law school, she would sleep elsewhere during his final exam period. During that time, my brother had a habit of jumping out of bed in the middle of the night only to lift the mattress to see what was underneath. I am not sure he even knew what he was looking for, but my sister-in-law would usually end up on the floor, hence the need to change her sleeping arrangements during that high stress time.

Fear and anxiety have become staples of the American diet. A third of Americans say they live with extreme stress in their lives<sup>ii</sup>; anxiety disorders are the number one mental health problem in America affecting nearly 40 million of us.<sup>iii</sup> We seemingly can't turn anywhere without hearing about the things we need to fear: hurricane season, economic recession, the increasing cost of fuel, food,

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health insurance, and education, flu pandemic, drug interactions, political instability around the world, terrorism, retirement savings. How much of this can we take and what are the effects on us physically, emotionally and of course spiritually?

Because human beings have always had a propensity to fret, Jesus had something to say about fear, anxiety and stress. The question for us, it seems is rather simple, “Is Jesus credible enough for us on this subject? As part of his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus asks his disciples, “Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?” He then dispenses advice to them, “Strive first for the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.”

It is patently obvious that we control very little of our destinies, for nobody has tomorrow. For some it will bring another monotonous day, for others it will bring life changing news, and still for others, it won’t come at all. We have this moment and that is all and if we fail to meet God in this moment, we will never ever, meet Him. That is the truth and such knowledge, when contemplated, will bring about the full measure of our faith.

I want to close today with a prayer written by Thomas Merton and reprinted in a book entitled *Dialogue with Silence*, published just a few years ago.

My Lord, I have no hope but in Your Cross. You, by Your humility, sufferings and death, have delivered me from all vain hope. You have killed the vanity of the present life in Yourself and have given me all that is eternal in rising from the dead.

My hope is in what the eye has never seen. Therefore let me not trust in visible rewards. My hope is in what the human heart cannot feel. Therefore let me not trust in the feelings of my heart. My hope is in what the hand has never touched, Do not let me trust what I can grasp between my

fingers, because Death will loosen my grasp and my vain hope will be gone.

Let my trust be in Your mercy, not in myself. Let my hope be in Your love, not in health or strength or ability or human resources.

If I trust You, everything else will become for me strength, health and support. Everything will bring me to heaven. If I do not trust You, everything will be my destruction.<sup>iv</sup>

In Jesus Name; Amen.

<sup>i</sup> Source: *Homiletics*, May - June 2008, Vol. 20, No. 3, pp. 31

<sup>ii</sup> Source: American Psychological Association study, 2007.

<sup>iii</sup> National Institute of Mental Health. Kessler RC, Chiu WT, Demler O, Walters EE. Archives of General Psychiatry,

2005 Jun;62(6):617-27.

<sup>iv</sup> Thomas Merton, *Dialogue With Silence*, ed. Jonathan Montaldo, Harper Collins, New York, NY, 2001, pp.109