

SERMON 856

Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 18, 2014

946th Week as Priest

772nd Week at St Dunstan's

37th Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

THE AGE OF ANXIETY

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

We live in the Age of Anxiety. Although we know that our lives are of infinite importance to God, we feel desperately insignificant, says Diogenes Allen. W.H. Auden wrote in his long poem of the same name,

We would rather be ruined than changed
We would rather die in our dread
Than climb the cross of the moment
And let our illusions die.

But there is sure and certain hope, if we will only open our eyes to see and our ears to hear. We believe that the words of Holy Scripture were true and filled with meaning in their own day, but we also recognize that the Scriptures carry

truth and meaning even to this day, and to our own lives and circumstances.

Never has this truth been more evident than in the essential message that Jesus gave his disciples in today's passage from the Gospel of John ... and allow me to use the Good News Translation so you hear it as if for the first time:

“Do not be worried and upset,” Jesus told them. “Believe in God and believe also in me. There are many rooms in my Father's house, and I am going to prepare a place for you. I would not tell you this if it were not so. And after I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to myself, so that you will be where I am. You know the way that leads to the place where I am going.”

Do not be worried and upset. Good advice for a people living in the Age of Anxiety. Immediately, our Lord reminds us that he is risen. He has conquered sin and death—even our sin and death. He has set things right. Martin Luther's great hymn, *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*, reminds us,

And though this world with devils filled
Should threaten to undo us
We will not fear for God has willed
His truth to triumph through us.

Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. And therefore, you don't have to worry.

Believe in God. Believe also in me. It is the timeless message of faith. In the old way we said, "I believe *on* Jesus Christ." I place all my hopes *on* him. I cast all my cares *on* him. I stake my life *on* him. I believe *on* him. Perhaps you are worried that your belief is not strong or constant. If so, then think about the things that a person of faith would say and do. Then start saying and doing those things—and continue saying and doing them. Before long, you will look back and find that you are indeed becoming a person of faith, a believer.

Central to Anglican tradition is the phrase, *lex orandi, lex credendi*. It means, "As we pray, so we believe." Ours is a practical faith, focused on tradition and engaged with the world. You can believe it; it is a sure and certain hope.

You know the way. Yes, followers of Jesus, we do know the way. We have the sacred stories at our fingertips. We have them burned into our hearts. And in our heart of hearts, we recognize that we know precisely what to do, and how to live, and where to put our priorities:

“Love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength; and love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

This is the antidote to our anxiety, our worries and our cares. Again Luther said,

Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing
Were not the right man on our side,
The man of God’s own choosing.

But we must look outside ourselves to find it. We cannot be made whole and healthy by our own strength, or by the best medicine, the healthiest diet, the perfect exercise program. No, the answer is in Christ, and with Christ, and through Christ. He is the way and the truth and the life. His way is to love God with all that we have, and all that we are. His truth is to love our neighbors as ourselves, and in doing so, we discover God’s love. The life to which he calls us is a life of love, a daily practice of “those small unremembered acts of kindness and of love which are the best part of a good man’s life.”

Lose yourself in these small unremembered acts of kindness and love, and you will discover yourself, or as Saint Paul suggested, “your better self”—as a follower of Jesus.

Give up your own striving—which is just a busy sort of losing—and strive first for the Kingdom of God. Pray without ceasing for healing and health, wholeness and peace, and then get up off your knees and visit the sick, feed the hungry, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted—and all for Christ’s sake and not your own.

Forget yourself, your own sad self, in a world of hurt and injustice, sorrow and suffering, and focus your attention on doing good.

And finally, Luther said, remember the Name of Jesus, that one little word that fells the power of darkness and evil.

That word above all earthly powers
No thanks to them, abideth.
The Spirit and the gifts are ours,
Through him who with us sideth.

Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also;
The body they may kill,

God's truth abideth still,
His Kingdom is for ever. **AMEN.**

969 words