

August 8, 2010; Pentecost 11C

Lections: Isaiah 1:1,10-20; Ps. 50:1-8,22,23; Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16; Luke 12:32-40

Some of you know that I had a week of clergy renewal at Chautauqua where I met a wondrous variety of gifted people including Barbara Brown Taylor whose preaching gave me a great start for my day. In her book, Leaving Church, she tells the story of her move from a downtown church in Atlanta to a small parish in the Georgia countryside. One afternoon she found a man arranging flowers in her rectory kitchen. She watched him work and then said, "You're good at that." His response, "why don't I like women priests?" "I don't know," she replied, "Why don't you?" "I don't know either, I just don't." "I'm Barbara," she said. "I know who you are, Mrs. Taylor. My name is Bruce." Even if his genuine disapproval was her first experience of him she decided that he was a straight shooter who might be kind enough to aim for her shoulder and not her heart, she decided.

At General Synod in Halifax this summer we were often confronted by a young man dressed in a white robe with a painted sign. On our way into and out of our long meetings he let us know that there was disapproval in the air. His quotes were from another prophet but Isaiah will do as a stand in..."I hate your fasts and solemn assemblies....when you stretch out your hands I will hide from you, even though you make many prayers I will not listen." God's pronouncement through the voice of the prophet was tied to the actions of a worshipping community; if compassion and mercy were not rising in the air as much as the smell of incense and burnt offerings then God would take aim at the heart of the matter.

Luke begins our lesson for the day with a phrase that has been addressed to many trembling people who crossed all sorts of picket lines and dividing lines of new territory and hope – be not afraid. ("fear not, little flock"). Maybe it really is fear that prevents us from living a life of blessing; maybe we are afraid of making room for new behaviour, new people, new ways of claiming our life in God.

Anxiety is our gentle name for fear. It keeps many awake at night especially if the over-the-counter sleep aid sales are true. We are tired, busy and stressed but we do not seem to truly rest. We take our lists of things to do with us and tuck them under the bed or the pillow hoping that by morning light or by magic they will have shrunk to something we can manage to live with. Can we add an hour to our lives by worrying? No, but we keep trying. Do we believe that God will provide as much for us as for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field? Is our faith deep enough to offer the rest we truly need? Or maybe we cannot rest until we have enough 'stuff,' the possessions or personal achievements that we use as a back-up in case we can't rely on God.

Maybe we are afraid that we won't get it right or find the world's approval. Maybe we are afraid that we won't get time in their office or on their very busy schedule. Maybe we are afraid that no one will show up or maybe they will come with a complaint about something we feel responsible for. Maybe we are afraid that love won't last, that we can't do what we said we would. We're afraid of a disapproving parent or an unhappy child,

afraid to age, to die, to be dependent, to ask for help; afraid to be alone or to miss the meaning of this one precious life we have been given. Fear can take up a lot of room.

So, Jesus says, let go to make room for a kingdom beyond yourself. It is God's desire that you live in blessing which comes in blessing others. This is a lesson that will not lie down; it is a wake-up call. Who wants a thief to come in and steal from us or from our friends or those we love? Who wants to be robbed of the pearl of great price?

"Do this and you will live," Jesus told the man who came to question him about eternal life. Love God, your neighbor and yourself. Wait and watch for the signs of the kingdom. They are at hand, he says, as he models the role of host and servant. Come in, sit and rest and you will be fed, he says, as he not only arranges the flowers but also prepares the meal.

The world has been waiting and watching outside our doors for a long time to see the kingdom he promises. Some have gotten tired and wandered away with their fears and losses and stuff. They think that our gathering here each week is sort of foolish, risking peace and a setting down of burdens in this place, trusting that we are called by God's own pleasure toward all that we need.

Come to the table, those who are hungry and thirsty, those who are tired of fear and worry. Even now all are met; even now all are welcome. Make room for the One who has been waiting to bless you, even now.

Amen+

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