

Sermon for Proper 13C
Sunday, July 31, 2016
“Chasing after wind”

Texts: Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-23; Colossians 3:1-11; Luke 12:13-21

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

As much as I tried to avoid being consumed by politics in the last two weeks, I found it nearly impossible to do so. First the Republican, then the Democratic Conventions took over every major network; I received countless number of pop-up updates from CNN and other news services on my cell phone; my Facebook page has been flooded with postings by friends and other people I don't know commenting on a whole host of topics surrounding the campaigns for POTUS. We get so caught up in all of the politics with such passion and intensity; sentiments are on edge, friendships are strained, awful things are said publically about individuals who passionately try to convince us that they have the right strategy to solve our problems. We post things to each other trying to convince each other of whose position is justifiable. “My position is correct and you should see things the way I see it.” Watching all of this chaos unfold, it is clear that we are caught up in a vanity of vanities. All is vanity. We are allowing vanity to consume us. We are chasing after wind, and paying little attention to the things that really matter.

At the beginning of today's short gospel reading, there is someone in a crowd who asks Jesus to tell his brother to share his inheritance with him. Jesus has been talking for some time in this section of Luke's Gospel about setting one's mind on the eternal, on things that will not pass away, on strengthening one's relationship with God, but this individual in the crowd is so consumed by getting his fair share that Jesus's words seem to go in one ear and out the other. All he can think about is his inheritance, so when there is the slightest break in Jesus's speech, he jumps in and asks Jesus to help him get his inheritance. Vanity of vanities, a chasing after wind. But Jesus quickly reminds him that he needs to get his priorities straight. Jesus quickly reminds him that collecting all the wealth in the world will be of no use when his life is demanded of him; when he returns to God, what kind of relationship will he have to show for it? Just like the man in the Parable of the Rich Fool, treasures on earth are useless if one has not stored up treasures in heaven.

Just what are the treasures of heaven anyway? What makes us rich toward God? Unfortunately, the reading ends where that question is answered. What follows is a reassurance by Jesus that “it is [the] Father’s good pleasure to give [us] the kingdom.” He says to his disciples:

“do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith!”

That speaks for itself, really. We needn’t worry because God wants to take care of us, and he will, just as he takes care of the rest of his creation.

But the world wants us to worry. That’s why political conventions and other rhetoric can incite so much passion from us. They want us to worry about how we’re going to keep our money, support ourselves and our families, feel safe and protected, stay healthy, and maintain our relatively comfortable lives—or at least how we can make our lives better in some way. Now that doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t care about what’s going on; that doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t participate in our political process or that we shouldn’t have an opinion. No, that’s not what I think Jesus would have told us at all. What he is trying to teach is that letting all of these matters consume our thoughts, minds, hearts, and actions is unnecessary and like chasing after wind. At some point, we simply should to give it over to God and let him work his purpose out in the midst of life’s chaos. That’s what he does.

Jesus also tells his disciples to go out and sell all that they have, give to the poor, and prepare themselves for the coming of God’s Kingdom. Well, that’s impractical for most of us; that’s just not an option. But what *is* an option is that we remember that we’re all in this together.

This is what Paul was getting at in what we heard today from his letter to the Colossians. “Put to death whatever is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry)...Get rid of...anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth.” Those things are selfish motives and serve to help no one, not even the self. In other words, we should do all that we can to lift each other up in whatever way we can or are called on to do. Sometimes that means financial help, sometimes that involves physical labor or demands of our time, sometimes it means simply being a listening ear, sometimes it means rejoicing in each other’s victories, sometimes it means sharing each other’s grief. But we are supposed to relate to each other in community; it’s how we humans are hot wired up here [point to brain]. Long before there was Holy Scripture or religious tradition to remind us, the human species has lived in community, perhaps it was small—just members of one’s kin—but it was community, nonetheless. When we let go of making it all about me—of making the self the center of the universe—then we can be open to making it all about us and open to letting God be at the center.

Don’t let the demands of the world worry you. However things turn out in November, just remember that God takes care of the birds of the air and the beasts of the field. And he will take care of us. As for our part in all this, we can lay aside our vanity; we can turn away from focusing on the self and strive to bring God’s kingdom about here on earth. We can show the world that there is more to life than chasing after wind. Amen.

Resources

“Commentary on Luke 12:13-21,” http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2923