

Epiphany 8A 2011
Texts: Isaiah 49: 8-16a
Psalm 131
1 Corinthians 4:1-5
Matthew 6:24-34

“No one can serve two masters: for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. Amen.

I want to start the sermon today in a very different way than usual. I would like all of you to take out your wallets. Now I would like you to take out a bill, any denomination will do. Don't worry we aren't having two offerings and this isn't going to be a stewardship sermon, although this passage is often used as such.

Now, look at the motto. What does it say? “In God we trust.”

“In God we trust.” The question for today is, do we really believe that? This is not a hypothetical question. Do you believe that personally and do you believe that as a congregation we really believe that motto? What are some of the examples that show you that St. Matthew's believes it?

Oh, I think we trust God for our eternal life and salvation. I don't question that at all. Have you noticed how much easier it is to trust God for something we believe to be in the future than to truly trust that God, the creator of the wildflowers and lilies, the birds and animals, will care for us daily? Why is it that we have an easier time trusting God in the future than we do the present?

This passage in Matthew is often read as an individual admonishment, but it wasn't given to an individual or two; this admonition was directed to the disciples and to the Matthean community around 90 A.D. after the Romans had destroyed the Temple in 70 A.D. The community had been under persecution and the Jewish believers had been thrown out of the synagogue.

This community may very well have been questioning whether their new community would survive. They had left family and friends and they weren't sure where the next meal would come from. Survival at that time was literally a day-to-day affair.

For some in the community to hoard the resources would mean that others in the community might well die. It was that simple. The future was so unsure, how could they believe that they would really survive? How could they not worry about how things would turn out?

“I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat and what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is life not more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”

Look back at the bill you removed from your wallet. In God *WE* trust. The operative term there is *WE*-plural. It is a reminder that as a community we are to be called to be faithful, and to share that faithfulness with others out of the abundance we have been given.

I think what has happened however, is that we have turned things around. Instead of “In God we trust” being a reminder to us of God’s providence and promises to us as we spend and share our resources, we have come to the point where the motto has attached itself to that green piece of paper. As a culture we have come to trust the power of our purchases. We have come to trust in what money can buy us. Money has become the god we trust.

One of the robber barrens of the last century was asked one time, “When will you know that you have enough?” To which this person replied, “Enough? Why there is never enough!” To think there is never enough, which sure is easy to do with the economic recession and its global ramifications, is to live out of a place of fear rather than faith.

This passage in Matthew is a reminder that only one thing can claim our allegiance. We can let that be money and the accompanying insecurities it brings, or it can be God with the promises that we are given through Jesus Christ. It cannot be both. We can either react out of a sense of scarcity, or we can respond in love with the trust that God

will give us what we need. In fact, it is the realization that we already have been given all we need that Jesus calls us to.

We have a cat by the name of COTA. Suffice it to say that COTA has some issues. Her major issue is that she has an allergy to protein-any type of protein. It doesn't matter if that protein comes from a pig, sheep, bull or fish. She can't eat it. If she does, the results are most unpleasant. The big problem is that life cannot be sustained without some sort of protein.

If she gets into our other cat's food, we will know it shortly because COTA will lick herself raw. What's more, the allergens remain in her system for three weeks after she has eaten the wrong thing. It is really hard to see her licking and nipping herself and pulling out her hair.

COTA has a very expensive food she has to eat as a result of this allergy. This particular food has broken protein down to the molecular level. The protein is so small that it is unrecognized by the body. Whereas this food keeps her alive, the issue is that protein fills you up and once you eat, you know you've eaten. For this poor cat to have to eat this food means she is always hungry, always needy, always begging to be fed again even though she has been given enough. She has been given enough to sustain her life and her body doesn't recognize that.

I think culturally we have developed an allergy, an allergy to the abundance that has been given to us. Our society has broken that abundance down to such small size that we don't recognize that we already have been fed.

We insist we need more and more even though it isn't good for us, even though we know it can lead to self-injurious behavior, even though it can lead to spiritual death. We insist on consuming the messages of society rather than on trusting God to provide what we need.

In 1992 Alan Durning wrote a book entitled *How Much is Enough? The Consumer Society and the future of the Earth.*¹ In his book he writes that since 1950 the world has used as many goods and resources as all previous generations combined. In America alone, in the 50 years

¹ As found in Homiletics, January/February 2011 vol. 23 #1 p. 73

between 1940 and 1990 as many mineral resources were used as had been used by all previous people who had lived on earth before then.

We have never had more. We have never been more affluent and yet, psychological studies show that we are not happier. Studies show, in fact, that we are at our most miserable with sky high rates of depression, anxiety, heart disease, obesity and other medical issues caused from chronic worry and anxiety.

That is not what God has given us and it is not what God wants for us. Jesus is calling us home, telling us that when we put ourselves and our future in God's hands we can stop worrying about what the future may or may not hold and start living fully in the present.

It is in the present that we feed our neighbor and care for the poor. It is in the present that we come together as a community to spread the Gospel. It is in the present we are asked to trust.

The great evangelist Billy Graham said, "We are not cisterns made for hoarding, we are channels made for giving."² Giving is an act of faith and trust.

We can and will share our resources with the world. We do it together, just as Matthew's community did it together two thousand years ago. We are Matthew's community here in the present. His words to that community in 90 A.D. are the words to our community in 2011.

We are a community that will give out of our abundance and our faith, not out of a sense of fear and scarcity. We can do this because it is in God we trust.

Amen.

² As found in A Continual Feast: Words of Comfort and Celebration. (Viking: New York, 1995) no page number given

