

Pentecost 11 C 2010  
Proper 14  
Texts: Isaiah 1:1, 10-20  
Psalm 50: 1-8, 23-24  
Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16  
Luke 12: 32-40

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Luke 12:32

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 don’t know how many of you get the Post-Dispatch and if you do whether you had a chance to read it this morning. On the editorial pages there is an essay written by Leonard Pitts of the Miami Herald entitled, “Keeping faith, losing religion.”<sup>1</sup> I commend it to you.**

**It is not a feel good piece; it is not a pat-ourselves-on-the-back kind of piece, but it is, in my humble opinion, an honest piece.**

**Some of you may have read about the author Anne Rice, the author of a best selling vampire series in the 80’s and 90’s. Think of the now popular Vampire series, Twilight, only her series is for adults. Anne Rice was raised Roman Catholic, had a long stretch where she considered herself an atheist and then had a much heralded return to the church of her youth.**

**Well, this week on her Facebook page she wrote: “Today, I quit being a Christian. I remain committed to Christ as always, but not to being ‘Christian’ or to being part of Christianity. It’s simply impossible for me to ‘belong’ to this quarrelsome, hostile, disputatious and deservedly infamous group. I’ve tried. I’ve failed. I’m an outsider. My conscience will allow nothing else... In the name of Christ, I refuse to be anti-gay. I refuse to be anti-feminist, I refuse to be anti-artificial birth control. I refuse to be anti-Democrat. I refuse to be anti-science. I refuse to be anti-life.”**

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<sup>1</sup> Found in St. Louis Post-Dispatch, August 8, 2010

**What Anne Rice is saying is that she refuses to have her faith put into neat little boxes that define, by another's standards, how worthy she may or may not be to hold the name Christian.**

**Leonard Pitts writes that we are our own worst enemies, that Christianity is on the decline and we have no one to blame but ourselves for that turn of events. When the Church traded its moral authority for political power the true message of Christ was lost. I winced when I read this piece. I winced because I know that what was written rang true and speaks to the magnitude of what the Church has lost in its authority and relevance.**

**We are not the only ones to ever have traded moral authority for political power. The story of Israel is of the rise, fall, rise and fall again of a people devoted to God and then turning from God and claiming power; not for the good of the poor, not for the good of widows and orphans, the sick and the imprisoned, not for instituting mercy and compassion, but for themselves.**

**Every time Israel forgot the imperative of service to others in the name of God, God gave them a royal comeuppance. Literally. Could it be that we are seeing our comeuppance? Could it be that we, just like Israel, have forgotten God's core message and as a result are beginning to see the consequences?**

**Whereas I cannot argue with how Rice and others, and to be very honest, much of the world, sees us Christians, I do need to argue the degree to which she finds us lacking.**

**I argue this not to make us feel better about our failings, or to defend God's one Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. I do this not to justify our inaction and behaviors; I do this so as to remind us of what Christianity is at its best. I do this to remind us what we can be again. I do this to remind us that we need not be stuck in this pattern of blindness and self-interest.**

**It was the Church that saved the world from the dark ages and helped inaugurate an expansion of knowledge and beauty that benefited all humanity. It was in the Church that education was given to all that professed its faith. Slowly certainly, but nonetheless it was life in the**

**Church that helped to pass on knowledge and pushed mans capacity to think about the world. The first hospitals were founded by religious orders, as were the first colleges and universities. Across time, the Church has touched the lives of hundreds of millions of people, many seen as untouchable, as unworthy, as the refuse of society. From the beginning it was the Church that responded to the crushing poverty of the masses.**

**Where would the world be today had the Church not responded to all these challenges? Where would the world be today had the Church not worked on behalf of others? Where would the world be had the Church not shown that there is more to life than this life? I shutter to think.**

**Would we have the beautiful Cathedrals whose spires bring our vision upward toward God? Would we have the stained glass windows, the music, and the communities of faith that have inspired people throughout the ages to believe in more than themselves?**

**How have we gotten to where we are? What have we done to deserve such a scathing reputation?**

**We have gotten too comfortable; we have begun to think that we have earned everything we have received rather than knowing that all we have is a gift from God.**

**We have become like the rich fool in last weeks gospel that believes he needs more and more and more. We have turned our wants into needs and we have forgotten that what we have been given is to be shared and shared with all of God's people, not just the ones we determine are worthy enough to receive it. Jesus told us to feed the poor, not to put them through a means test first.**

**Perhaps the biggest reason we have strayed so far is because we have become afraid. We live in a state of perpetual anxiety. Do I have enough? Will there be another recession? Do I have enough money to see me through retirement? Will there be another terrorist attack?**

**Our readings for this morning address our fear and anxiety. In our gospel reading we hear, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."**

**Listen to how intimate and loving that is, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”**

**For no other reason than God’s pleasure we have already been given the kingdom. We have been called into relationship with God and invited to participate in the kingdom here and now. God knows we humans are a fearful and anxious bunch, but God also tells us that He is enough.**

**The important thing here is that when we trust, when we decide to live in the kingdom now, today, “we are not only freed from our anxiety we are freed for life in this world.”<sup>2</sup> Being freed for life in this world means being freed in order to serve others.**

**The thief in the night breaking into the house of the Master in today’s gospel is our own fear. Ultimately our fear robs us of the work we are to do in the kingdom. Our fear paralyzes us. Rather than seeing the other as a brother and sister, fear tells us to be wary of people we do not know or understand and as a result we hold back.**

**Fear tells us that there will never be enough and that we must hold on to what we have because we never know when we may need it. As a result we are robbed of the blessing of generosity.**

**Fear tells us that we will never be good enough, or pretty enough, or rich enough or smart enough and so we go after our salvation as if we can earn it. We spend money on cosmetic procedures because we believe that our looks define us. We work and work and work and work, sixty, seventy, eighty hours a week, to make sure that we won’t run out of anything. In the end our fear helps us to concentrate on own needs verses the needs of others, which are the kingdom’s needs.**

**Jesus tells us how to counter our fears and anxiety. If we are afraid then we need to engage in acts of faith. If we are anxious about what we don’t have, we are to share what we do have. Are we terrified of what the future may hold? Then we must live gratefully in the present.**

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<sup>2</sup> [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org)- David Lose for August 8, 2010

**Doing all these things will help us experience the kingdom as the gift that it is. The kingdom will not be fully realized until Christ comes again, but God's gift to us is that a part of it is already here to be experienced. God's gift to us is that we are asked to be a part of it today.**

**What Anne Rice is telling us is that she can claim Christ but not Christianity because she sees us as closing our minds and our hearts and our hands. The kingdom is about opening all of those things.**

**When we are seen as being more condemning than compassionate, more miserly than merciful, more bigoted than benevolent, more interested in gossip than the gospel, then something is desperately wrong, and it is not necessarily the impression.**

**Where I think Anne Rice gets it wrong is that kingdom speaks of community. Christianity is not a kingdom of one. Living and praying and trying to make sense of our lives together is certainly more challenging than just claiming belief in Christ.**

**When we become fearful, others can remind us to not be afraid. When we become anxious it is the community that can remind us that this life is not all there is and that we await something more glorious and more healing than we can imagine. When we want to put off our gospel responsibilities it is the community that can remind us that we are here to serve others and not to withdraw into selfishness and self-interest. None of these things can happen if we do not put out the hard work of living in community.**

**I cannot argue that people see us as small minded, anti-intellectual and hypercritical. But I can argue that this is neither the complete picture nor accurate representation of Christ's message and how Christians, when truly responding to the gospel, choose to live.**

**We are human, not perfect, and as far as I can tell that is why we need a Savior who is no less than God himself.**

**And because our Savior is God, we need not be afraid, little flock. We need not be afraid.**

