



The Inclusive Community

Eighth Sunday after Epiphany

February 27, 2011

Isaiah 48: 8-16a Matthew 6: 24-34

Trust

Homily of Terry and Fred Quinn

Terry

Perhaps it was fortuitous that Anthony asked Fred to take his place today because this gospel was obviously written for me. Unlike Hester Prynne in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (thank goodness!) I would not have an "A" on my shirt, but a "W" --for Worry. I am the official worrier of the family—I try not to be—but I think it 's in the genes. Thankfully Fred is not similarly afflicted.

This gospel has 2 messages—the first being that having money is not the answer to life's happiness and that it needs to be used with care—and the second (the one that surely applies to me) is "Don't worry. Be happy." When this song was popular, I really tried to sing it a lot, hoping that by singing it, the words would seep into my psyche. It helped a little.

Jesus is telling us not to worry, not to be concerned about the peripheral. Jesus taught that material concerns were secondary to the rich fulfillment that comes from the experience of God and from living and evolving with God. Actually, this gospel is full of what are termed "aphorisms." The bible abounds with them. They are memorable short sayings closely related to proverbs. They are like proverbs in one way, being concise sayings suggesting how to live.--- but they are different in origin and practice. Proverbs commonly express conventional wisdom or common sayings of a particular culture—what everyone knows or should know. They are pithy sayings showing us how to live in contrast to acting foolishly or hurtfully. Aphorisms contain fresh insight usually from a particular individual and actually function as an antidote to what might be conventional wisdom. They are surprising and thought-provoking. We actually spoke about another

TRUST

TERRY AND FRED QUINN

aphorism in our previous homily—you may recall “You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt loses its strength, how can saltiness be restored?” They are the “catch phrases” or the best commercials of the bible.

Jesus tells us not to serve God and wealth—they do not go together—remember Jesus came from Nazareth where, as Chilton tells “everyone was in debt” (sound familiar?). It may be the reason why Jesus and many other Jews referred to “sin” as “debt” in the Aramaic language. Peasants owed owners a rent that they could not pay and so handed over most of the rich produce of their harvests just so they could remain indentured on their land. It is not surprising that Jesus was repelled and even shocked by the prominent display of debt acquired wealth. Synagogues were built that were ostentatious and purported to be majestic, but Jesus saw them as symbols of wealth while the poor suffered (again, sound familiar?). It’s why we personally are offended by those in our modern world who would proclaim their Christianity and live very comfortably while decimating programs that would benefit the poor and disenfranchised. The Sojourners led by the Rev. Jim Wallis are actually sending bracelets to Congress with the saying, “What would Jesus cut?”

Jesus also despised the elaborate banquets of the wealthy Jews of the time where the most influential guests were invited. Perhaps this is why Jesus often ate informally with the lowly or what was termed the “sinners.” We can almost picture the tableau of Jesus, turning his back on wealthy displays and gravitating to the people in the hamlets and villages who welcomed him to share what they had and were blessed by his presence and their connection to him.

The second aphorism is really an appreciation of nature and an appeal for trust.

Though we know almost nothing about the early life of Jesus, we can surmise from the writings of the time that he was of the working class—that he most probably helped in the fields, helped Mary tend the garden and then learned a trade, and instructed by Joseph, journeyed through Galilee repairing and building. Galileans were proud of and grateful for the fertility of their land and how it provided food and wine for them. Jesus must have spent many hours in the open fields, perhaps watching the birds as he worked and appreciating the beauty of nature. He obviously meditated on what he saw and what he saw was God in creation—the everywhere God whose beauty is manifest in so many ways. However, as I thought about this I realized that the birds in the air and the lilies of the field are in jeopardy in today’s world, even in the part of the world in which Jesus lived—so that when we meditate on the beauty of nature and what it provides for us—we also may be awed by it, but we may create our own modern aphorism. “Look at the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, a living picture of God. Let us try to save the environment in which these creatures live.” And—of course, we realistically need to plan for our finances, especially in today’s uncertain financial world, but perhaps we can say in our modern aphorism, “Focus on the inner spirit, the kingdom

TRUST

TERRY AND FRED QUINN

of the spirit and try in whatever way you can to relate to others in positive ways, to encourage righteousness or justice and to live with compassion. “

Now Fred has a story that relates to our modern day aphorism and might also be one which we may have heard or uttered at one time or another---and is still true even in this time of recession---Some things are more important than money.

Fred

Though the origin of this story is unknown, It has popped up on e-mail and in some contemporary writings. It's a moving story that expresses an epiphany in the life of a cabbie.

A night-shift cab-driver picked up a woman on a late August night. He was responding to a call from a small brick complex in a quiet part of town. He assumed that he was being sent to pick up some hung-over partyers or someone who just had a fight with a lover or a worker heading for an early shift in the industrial part of town.

When he got there at 2:30 AM the building was dark except for a single light in a ground floor window. Under the circumstances, most drivers would honk once or twice, wait a minute, and then drive away. But this cab-driver was different. He had seen too many impoverished people who depended on taxis as their only means of transportation or people who needed assistance. So he got out, walked to the door and knocked.

“Just a minute” answered a frail, elderly voice.

He could hear something being dragged across the floor and, after a long pause, the door opened. There was a short elderly woman wearing a blue print dress and a pillbox hat with a veil pinned on it looking for all the world like somebody out of a 1940s movie. By her side was a small nylon suitcase.

He got a glimpse of the apartment that looked like no one had lived in it for years; the furniture was covered with sheets. There were no clocks, knickknacks or utensils on the counters. In the corner was a cardboard box filled with photos and glassware.

“Would you carry my bag to the car?” the woman asked. So he took the suitcase to the cab, then returned to assist the woman who took his arm as they walked slowly to the curb. When they got into the cab she gave him the address, and then asked, “Could you drive through downtown?”

“It's not the shortest way.” He answered.

TRUST

TERRY AND FRED QUINN

“Oh, I don’t mind.” She said. “I’m in no hurry. I’m on the way to a hospice.

When he looked in the rearview mirror, he noticed her eyes were glistening. “I don’t have any family left,” she continued, “The doctor says I don’t have very long.”

The cabbie then quietly reached over and shut off the meter. “What route would you like to take?” he asked.

For the next two hours, they drove through the city. She showed him the building where she once had been employed as an elevator operator. They drove through the neighborhood where she and her husband had lived as newlyweds. They pulled up in front of a furniture warehouse which had once been a ballroom where she had gone dancing as a girl. Sometimes she’d ask the cabbie to slow down in front of a particular building or corner and would sit staring into the darkness, saying nothing.

As the first hint of sun was lighting up the horizon she suddenly said, “I’m tired. Let’s go now.”

They drove in silence to a small convalescent home. Two orderlies came out to the cab. They were obviously expecting her.

The cabbie opened the trunk and took the small suitcase to the door. The woman was already seated in a wheelchair. “How much do I owe you?” she asked, reaching into her purse.

“Nothing”, he said.

“You have to make a living,” she protested.

“There are other passengers,” he responded.

Almost without thinking, he bent over and gave her a hug. She held him tightly. “You gave an old woman a little moment of joy,” she said. “Thank you” He squeezed her hand then walked into the dim morning light. Behind him a door shut. It was the sound of a life moving to its next phase, and bringing with it the joy of memory.

Now let the cabbie finish the story in his own words:

“I didn’t pick up any more passengers that shift. I drove aimlessly, lost in thought. For the rest of that day I could hardly talk. What if that woman had gotten an angry driver or one who was impatient to end his shift? What if I had refused to take the run, or had

honked once, then driven away? On a quick review, I don’t think I have done anything more important in my life.”

TRUST

TERRY AND FRED QUINN

And so we come back to what Jesus said, “You cannot be the slave of God and of money”—the cabbie trusted the spirit of God moving him to respond to the needs of the woman without worrying about finishing his shift and getting home — he trusted his own spiritual instincts becoming a God bearer to the woman---and ultimately to himself. May we all listen to the spirit and enrich the presence of God in the world.