

Year A – 33rd Sunday – 11/18-19/17

Where should I begin? Two months ago I spoke about the mass shooting in Las Vegas that left over 50 people dead. I mentioned that it was likely not the last time we would hear about another mass shooting. Unfortunately my words were truer than I had realized. Two weeks ago during Sunday religious services at a small church in Texas, another mass shooting occurred. This time over two dozen people were killed. Now this week another shooting, this time in California, that left five people dead. I guess we have to be grateful that the death tolls are going down!

Also happening now in Burma/Myanmar there is a tragedy affecting the Rohingya, a small ethnic Muslim minority in a Buddhist majority country. Over 600,000 people have been forced to flee for their lives and take refuge in Bangladesh. Reports of ethnic cleansing, atrocities and genocide have come to light.

On the border of Iran and Iraq a massive earthquake has taken the lives of over 500 people and injured many others.

The plague that is Isis has continued to bring violence to the Middle East and has now spread to parts of Africa. Most recently it was responsible for the deaths for four American service members and some of their Nigerian allies.

In Venezuela there is an ongoing economic crisis that has plagued the people. There are shortages of food and medicines. Daily life has become a struggle for survival.

In Puerto Rico the people, American citizens, are continuing to struggle with the effects of the hurricanes that battered the island. Power, clean water, food and medicine are still hard to obtain.

Here in the US there is a growing awareness that an opioid crisis that is ruining families and taking the lives of people. This crisis involves both illegal drugs and the abuse of prescription medications.

The battle over health care could take away health care for millions of our fellow citizens. People with health issues are concerned about either how or whether they will be able to afford health care. There is also a continuing debate over how to affect tax reform and give relief to middle class Americans. Families and individuals are uncertain whether they will be better or worse off.

With everything happening in our country and our world it might seem that the best thing to do is crawl into bed, pull the covers over your head, and hope that everything just goes away.

Jesus uses the word "talent" in today's parable. In Jesus' time the "talent" was a unit of weight and its monetary value would fluctuate depending on the time period and whether you were weighing gold or silver. Generally a "talent" might be the rough equivalent of one year's wages for an unskilled laborer. Jesus tells that each of the man's servants received a certain measure of the man's possessions. Each received an amount according to their abilities. Two were risk takers and were able to double what had been entrusted to them. The third was not a risk taker and was actually fearful of his master, and out of fear buried the man's one "talent" and returned it to him. The first two servants, the risk takers, were rewarded by the man with more

responsibilities. The third servant had his one “talent” taken away and was thrown out of the man’s service.

The parable is not about taking risks to make more money for someone else in order to obtain a better position. The parable shows that fear can be a powerful emotion. It can even lead to paralysis. When we look across all four Gospels there is one common theme that is continually repeated, “...do not be afraid.” When the angel Gabriel appears to Mary at the Annunciation she is told “...do not be afraid.” When Mary Magdalene and the others find Jesus’ tomb empty, the angel tells them “...do not be afraid.”

Why should we not be afraid? When we are baptized we receive God’s life within us and we are made over in the likeness of God’s only Son, our savior and lord, Jesus. Through his birth, life, suffering, death and resurrection Jesus has obtained for us the possibility of eternal life. As St. Paul tells us, “...if God is for us who can be against us.” Life can still bring many trials our way but it cannot rob us of the promise of God made through Jesus. We are called to live our lives openly as follower of Jesus and be a guiding light for the whole world. Jesus even tells us that one “...does not put a light under a bushel basket.”

Some years ago I received a prayer poem that I would like to share:

To worry goes no good at all, but does a lot of harm;

It puts cross lines upon your face, and dissipates your charm.

Whatever is to be, will be; that, worry cannot change;

It only serves to dim your joy, and all your friends estrange.

'Tis lack of confidence in self, that causes worry's fright;

A lack of faith in God's design, your happiness will blight.

Then cast aside those gloomy thoughts, and bid your dark fears flee;

Live in the light of faith and love, joyful and worry free.

We each have to decide each day whether we either give into fear or, are willing to trust the

God who loves us unconditionally and share with the world that same love.