

“Trusting God’s Future of Hope”

Jeremiah 29:10-14; Matthew 6:25-34 – Rev. Rebecca Littlejohn
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Holy God, bless the speaking and the hearing of these words, that we might trust in your future of hope and not let worry keep us from following Jesus. In the name of the Risen Christ we pray, Amen.

Jesus sure does know how to make me feel like a Gentile! We’ve been watching old episodes of “Columbo” at my house recently, and it just occurred to me the other day that Lieutenant Columbo, despite being portrayed as the antithesis of hip, wears a “uniform” in much the same way that Steve Jobs did. That is, it’s not actually a uniform, but rather a set of clothing that he wears every day with very little variation. In Columbo’s case, it’s a rumpled brown suit and a raincoat, while Steve Jobs wore his black t-shirts. I’m pretty sure Steve Jobs had more t-shirts than Columbo did suits, but the idea is the same. The goal was what Jesus is talking about here, not having to worry about what you’re going to wear. I’m guessing both Columbo and Jobs had more clothes than Jesus did. I would imagine Jesus never experienced difficulty getting the day going because he couldn’t decide what to wear.

#FirstWorldProblems

But I do want to point out another aspect of these verses. The examples of worrying Jesus puts forth here could sound like they’re coming from a person who

has never had to spin or sew, or prepare breakfast, lunch and dinner for a Messiah and his twelve disciples, plus countless other hangers-on. That is to say, we cannot ignore that this passage opens up the possibility of interpretations that create harmful gender dynamics. Towards the end of the passage, Jesus admits that “your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.” But he does not say, “that’s why he sent Martha here to take care of them for you.”

All of this is to say, this passage could easily be mis-used to add guilt and shame on top of the stress that woman and other people made anxious by the constant work of taking care of people experience. So let’s be clear: that isn’t what we’re here to do today. That is not a faithful use of scripture, nor a solid understanding of the kind of life Jesus calls us to share. In order to make sense of Jesus’ call not to worry, we have to put it into the broader context of the kind of community that Jesus is calling us to become. We aren’t kept from worry about what to wear or what to eat because someone else – someone outside the community or some kind of “second-class citizen” within the community – is taking care of those things. And we aren’t kept from this worrying because God magically puts clothes out on the chair for us each night and makes food appear on our tables, like some kind of divine Mom. We are kept from worrying because no one person is carrying that load. We are all pitching in to do what needs to be done, as we are able.

Trusting in God’s future of hope means participating in God’s future of hope. Trusting God means partnering with God. Trusting God means listening to God, to

see where that future is leading and to follow even when we can't see where the path ends. Trusting in God's future of hope means living like it's real. Trusting God means refusing to let our anxieties or cynicism dictate our actions. "Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?" Jesus asks. And he could just as easily have been asking that about the life of a congregation. When we approach the future from a place of worry, we cannot see where God is leading.

Both of our passages today invite us to trust and hope. And they tell us how. "Search for me... seek me with all your heart," God says in Jeremiah. "Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness," Jesus says. Faithfulness in getting the work done, making sure the basic needs of the community are met is a vital part of that. Pitching in to make sure no one person is carrying the load of worry is essential. But even more important is helping each other keep our hearts focused on the deeper purpose of that work. The continual work of clarifying why we're here, what God is calling us to be and to do, how the gospel asks us to live in this world at this point in history, that is how we live into God's future of hope.

As we celebrate our 75th anniversary this year, the occasion invites us to pull our perspective back and see the broader swath of this congregation's life. One end of that timeline is clearer, even if the photographs are a little blurry and the papers may not record the things we really wonder about. But the other end is obscured, clothed only in the promises of God. What are our hopes? How far into that future do they stretch? Are they centered solely on what this church means to each of us as

individuals? Or are they built on a vision of what God could do with this congregation in the next five, 20, 50 years? What is it we're pitching in for, and why? Who is this God we're claiming to trust, and what does our community need to know about this God? If we're devoting our time and our energy and our resources to what God is doing here, there must be an important reason. It's not that doing so compels God to magically "fix" our lives. It's not that Jesus told us we'd better or else.

These are questions we need to answer together. But I think we have clearer answers than we sometimes realize. We keep coming back because there is a Love here that gives our lives purpose and meaning. We keep coming back because when we're here, we're reminded that our lives – and the lives of every living things – matter to God. We keep coming back because we want to be fed at the Table of Grace, to receive the Bread of New Life that transforms everything else we eat into a blessing from God. We keep coming back because we know that our world is broken, and we want to nourish the hope that lives deep within our hearts by casting our eyes again and again, as a community, on the vision of wholeness God has for our world. We keep coming back because we want to believe that God isn't done with us yet. We have no idea what the world will be like in 75 years, but there is no doubt that it will still be in need of the love of God, the mercy of Christ and the reconciling power of the Holy Spirit. We pitch in what we can as a way of partnering with God to bring that into being. Is it scary? Sure. Should we worry? Nah. Christ is risen. We can trust God's future of hope. Hallelujah and Amen.