

Three Pentecost, Proper 4  
Matthew 7:21-29

If you were here last Sunday you heard the reading from the Sixth Chapter for the Gospel of Matthew from verses 24-34. If you weren't here or have forgotten exactly what that reading was about, having had a whole week of life in between, let me take a moment to refresh your mind. Our reading last week was one that I think most of us should have taped to our mirrors to be encountered daily, it speaks to not worrying, or not being anxious, it reminds that the birds of the air are fed and the lilies of the field are clothed in great array and would not God do even more for us, those created in God's own image. Finally the reading ended last week with these words, "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today." And to that we can all say 'amen!' Each day is sufficient unto itself in worries – and in pleasures and it is good to remember that we cannot add one single hour to our span of life by worrying, as a matter of fact, worrying may even take away hours from our span of life. So, this *is* Good News. It is news we, especially those of us who tend to be the half-empty worrying sort, need to hear. And then we come to the reading for today and we wonder what sort of roller coaster we have strapped ourselves into with this faith ride. All of the don't worry-ness of last week has evaporated into thin air along with the birds of the air and the lilies of the field and we are immediately

hit with Jesus saying, “Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.” Wait, I thought we just heard the original version of Bobby McFerrin’s late 1980’s tune, “Don’t Worry, Be Happy,” and now this – the thing we worry about most- who’s going to get in to the Kingdom of Heaven. And as we move continue through this reading, those of us who live near the coast become even more uneasy.

We hear Jesus speak a little more about what this means, this doing the will of God. He uses the image of house building to describe this and for those of us living near or on the coast it hits close to home. Jesus says, the person who hears these words of mine and acts on them is like the man who built his house on rock, the rains fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat on that house but it did not fall in. He continues to describe the “foolish man” who built his house on sand and the same storm came and the house fell and as Jesus exclaims, “great was the fall.” We know about this. We know about houses falling because they were built on ground that, at least up until the moment they fell, seemed as safe as any other place and now we know that houses South of here are not actually built on soil at all, but on piers, and way up in the air and we think we are safe because Jesus doesn’t actually address that. Those of us who have not lost property to a hurricane also wonder, in our worried way of wondering who gets in and who is out, if those folks who’s

houses did succumb to Ivan or Katrina, or any other of those storms, actually might have been spared had they been wiser, or more faithful, or any number of things. But if we are of the group that have lost property we know that the wind blows where it will and it is not what is lost but what our foundation is and that is exactly what Jesus was saying. He didn't say, if you listen to what I am saying and do the will of my father the storms will pass you by. (This is not a happily ever after life, this life of following Christ.) What Jesus says is that you may be rocked, you may be shaken, but you will not fall if you have faith – if you hear his words and follow them. Oh, and by the way, if you didn't realize it , this is the first day of hurricane season. God has interesting timing.

But what about that part in the middle of our reading from the Gospel? That might be the hardest of all to hear. It is certainly a contrast to the verse from Luke where Jesus says, “those who are not against us are for us,” in response to the disciples wanting to run off some outsiders who were casting out demons in Jesus' name. (Mark 9:38-41) He, in Mark, even says, “For I truly tell you that whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.” But here we have people who have been prophesying, casting out demons, and doing many deeds of power in the name of Jesus and Jesus responds to them when they call out to him, “ I never knew you; go away from me you evil doers.” This all seems so contradictory, but it may not be, if you listen closely and pay attention - as Jesus would say, if you

hear his words and then act on them. The key phrase here being, “ I never knew you.” You might have called on my name, acted as though you were in relationship with me, but I never knew you. It’s about being in relationship with Jesus. It’s about not just going through the motions or the actions of being a follower, but actually following me, acting upon what you have heard, and while that is truly Good News, it is not easy news.

It’s about being transparent. The Gospel reading that we have heard today comes at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. When we hear the term Sermon on the Mount our minds usually go to the Beatitudes, “blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted, et cetera.” That is only the beginning and it begins in Chapter Five. What we have today is the end of what we would consider an inordinately lengthy sermon that includes all sorts of information that sounds a lot like the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament, with warnings and admonishments, telling us how to live and how not to live and they all point to transparency, being exactly what you profess to be, not just saying that you follow Jesus, but actually following him, having him as you guide and example, not just telling people you go to St. John’s Episcopal Church but knowing why, and why not being because my friends do, or my parents do, or it’s just what we do.. that would be teetering on the edge of ‘I never knew you.’

Part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount includes the call to us to be the light of the world (5:13-16), where he says, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your father in Heaven." This again is a call to be transparent, a word that is defined as "capable of transmitting light so that objects or images can be seen as though there were no intervening material." That is it. Jesus says, "be transparent." Transmit my image and let nothing intervene. Whatever you do, wherever you are, let your attitude, your actions, everything about you be transparent so that Christ will be seen with no intervening material, with nothing in the way. If you do that you don't have to worry if what Jesus will say to you. We are right back where we started with, 'do not worry' because if we are transparent and what shows through is Christ he will say, "well done, Good and faithful servant." Thanks be to God. Amen.