

Gospel: Luke 12 32-40

9 Pentecost 19

Sermon Patti Case

8.11.19



(Let your loving kindness, O Lord, be upon us
As we have put our trust in you.)

I spent the big bucks decorating our altar this morning – with pearly everlasting.

It's a flower that blooms ubiquitously at the edges of our northwest forests this time of year. It's not showy, nor is it even terribly interesting. I daresay you pass by it often without giving it a second glance.

Nor is it really "everlasting," though it is a sturdy little thing. Yes, it will dissolve when fall rains come, like so much of our summer beauty. I've used it today to represent the "little flock" of today's gospel. I could have used a lot of other, more beautiful white flowers, such as the puffy hydrangeas that are growing in my garden, or the gorgeous gladiolas that graced our altar last weekend. Or even the Queen Anne's lace that's also bobbing its heads along our roadsides.

But the pearly everlasting seemed like the best choice to depict our gospel. These plants have not used a great deal of nature's energy – sun, water and nutrients- to grow up, among the rocky soils of East Mason County, and yet they bless us with their sweet, unassuming faces. Best of all, they're free of charge.

The arrangement today shows the pearly everlasting marching away from the beauty of a more traditional bouquet. The pearly everlasting is what happens when the rose gives up its irrigation, its aphid spray, its fertilizer, its pruning and deadheading....As I said, it's a sturdy little thing. "Do not fear, little flock...sell your possessions and give alms."

I learned a new term as I researched in preparation for this sermon. It's called "grinding the Scripture to fit." I'm sure YOU'VE never been guilty of this.

Does Jesus REALLY want me to sell my possessions? I live a comfortable life, and I need those extra bedrooms for the family when they visit. I need those extra acres to insulate me from my neighbors after a stressful day or week at work. And yes, I need that awesome salary my career affords, in order to reward me for the strain of that same career....

Yeah, I've been guilty of grinding the Scripture to fit. I'm convinced that God has not called me to give up EVERYTHING. Has he?

Yet if I'm being truly honest with myself, there aren't too many other ways to interpret that line: sell your possessions and give alms. I can grind those words to fit my reality. I can interpret them literally, wear a camel's hair robe and eat locusts. Or probably spiders and crickets are more appropriate in this neck of the woods. Although, for those of you who are adventurous, I'm told the pearly everlasting is edible.

Not.

Or I could consider another possibility – that he means this verse literally, that if we worship money we cannot worship him. And if we worship him, we will not worship money. I don't worship money. I don't think. But maybe I worship it a little more than He wants me to. I can confess that sin to God and ask for his forgiveness. And I can start over tomorrow. And the next day. And the next. And God, in his grace, says, "Do not fear, little flock. It is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Do not fear, little flock."

When I was at the University of Washington in the 70s, there was a guy who stood on the steps of the Husky Union Building, or in Red Square, or in the Quad with a sign warning "THE END IS NEAR." He muttered to himself and largely ignored the students around him, except when someone or something would agitate him, at which point he'd get in someone's face and swear loudly.

I wonder if he's still there.

Because, near as I can tell, his prediction has not yet come true.

There's a character in a Tom Robbins novel, called Turn Around Norman. Turn Around Norman seems to live on the steps of our nation's capitol. To the casual observer, he's a statue – unmoving. One has to watch carefully to discern that, over the course of a day, he makes one full 360 degree turn, ending in the same position he started.

We Christians are still awaiting the second coming, over 2000 years after it was predicted. It's enough to make us let down our guard. To walk away from the likes of Turn Around Norman. And yet we are to be ever watchful. To be light on our feet, to keep our lamps lit awaiting his return.

I may be more ready for the second coming tomorrow than I am today. Today, the laundry is dirty and I haven't seen much of my husband since the beginning of the week. It's possible I was praying for the second coming as I stood in a newly planted forest on Friday afternoon in Mississippi in the 100+ degree heat, but I'll bet there were folks praying the second coming didn't happen before I finished my audit report.

Yes, I could be more prepared. My own priorities suggest that I've got a little lamp lighting to do. But I'll admit, I have earthly fears. My husband's health, my financial stability as I head into those golden years. Do you have such fears? They may be earthly fears, but they're real.

And yet. "Do not fear, little flock. It is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Whether we're ready or not, whether we've sold all our possessions and given alms or not, God knows we are a work in progress. I love my big house and my expense account. I don't love the idea of eating bugs and grubs. But I know what's important. I know that every day, I'm committed to loving you and you and you as God loves me. I am committed to following Jesus. I am imperfect at that, but I'm committed every day to trying. Like the pearly everlasting, we can bloom where we are planted in rocky, arid, forbidding places. Where our treasure is, there our hearts will be also.

Amen.

