

“Be Glad and Rejoice”
The Rev. Lauren McDonald
Hickory Neck Episcopal Church – Toano, VA
Thanksgiving – November 26, 2009
Joel 2:21-27, Matthew 6:25-33

Do not fear, O soil. Do not fear, you animals of the field. O children of Zion, be glad and rejoice. Do not worry about your life. Do not worry about your clothing. Worry will not add a single hour to your span of life. Do not worry. Do not fear. Strive for the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Be glad and rejoice.

Over and over we hear these words. Do not worry. Do not fear. Be glad and rejoice. Do not worry. Do not fear. Be glad and rejoice.

But how, Lord? How can we not worry when our friends have cancer? How can we not worry when our family member has a heart attack? How can we not worry if we've lost our job? How can we not be afraid when the doctor gives us a frightening diagnosis? How can we not be afraid when our child has H1N1? How can we not be afraid when someone starts shooting in a school or at Fort Hood or in a mall? How can we be glad and rejoice when there is so much pain and suffering in the world? How can we be glad and rejoice when the economy is in recession and we are at war and people keep dying? How can we just be glad and rejoice when there are so many things to worry about?

Jesus tells us to consider the lilies of the field. They don't worry. They don't work and strive and fear. Well, I've always thought that those lilies would be good and worried if they knew what was best for them. They should be worried about the deer eating them. They should be worried about droughts and floods and raging winds. They should be worried about people who come along and pick them. They should be worried about lawnmowers.

Of course, Jesus didn't mean for us to be so literal in our interpretation of his metaphor. Lilies aren't worried because lilies aren't human and don't have brains. They're just plants. But I think what Jesus is getting at is that the lilies and the birds and the other parts of creation are wholly themselves. They're *living* not worrying, being the creatures that God created them to be. Jesus, who was also wholly himself, spent his time living and not worrying. He seems to have known what would happen to him in Jerusalem. If he had been the worrying type, he could easily have avoided Jerusalem, thereby avoiding his death. But he wasn't worried about what he would eat or what he would wear, or even that he would die. He trusted God.

Worrying is not a part of the lives of lilies and birds. Worrying was not part of the life of Jesus. Worry doesn't gain us anything. It only steals time away from us, time that we could be spending with our loved ones or in nature or in laughter or in prayer. Unlike the lilies and birds, human beings seem naturally inclined to worry, but we can also pray for God to take our worry away from us. We can pray for God to help us trust, for God to give us the strength that we need. It's simple, but it's vital. We can take our fears and worries to God in prayer and then let go of them.

This week I've been reading a poem that Mary Oliver wrote about a lily. She describes the lily in the garden and suggests that maybe it says some small words in a language we can't hear, perhaps the words of a prayer. At the end of the poem, she writes,

“or maybe,

it says nothing at all

but just stands there

with the patience

of vegetables

and saints

until the whole earth has turned around

and the silver moon

becomes the golden sun –

as the lily absolutely knew it would,

which is itself, isn't it,

the perfect prayer?”¹

I love that image of the lily in its garden or field standing there patiently watching the night turn into day, knowing with surety that the darkness will fade away and the light will return. It will for us too. We can be absolutely certain of it.

¹ Mary Oliver, “The Lily,” in *Why I Wake Early* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 25.

As we watch the sun return to us today, I wonder if we can let go of whatever fears and worries may be pressing upon us and turn instead to God with gratitude, to be glad and rejoice. Certainly many things can be taken away from us, but first those things were gifts from our Creator. This day of Thanksgiving is a perfect time to remember those gifts not with fear that they may be lost but with gratitude that they were given to us at all.

Do not fear, O soil. Do not fear, you animals of the field. O children of Zion, be glad and rejoice. O beloved children of God, be glad and rejoice!