

## Uncertainty and your life

**Text:** Take no anxious thought for tomorrow... Seek first the Kingdom.

A few years ago, near the end of the year, there was a terrible accident on the 401. It fell to me to do the funeral.

The victim set off that morning as she always did. She was a very good driver on a familiar route. Suddenly a truck wheel rolled off, crossed the median and landed on her windshield, killing her instantly.

Without any warning, the day-to-day certainty of her presence was gone, and her family were confronted with a new reality-life without her! So, so hard!!

The thing is that could happen to anyone of us, and we all know it. We know that life is uncertain. Sure, we try hard to make ourselves more secure. We save money and put it into RRSP's. We do our best to keep fit. But...

There are those of us who through exercise, good diet and habits live well into our eighties. Moses is the gold standard for the Jewish community length of life at 120 years, and Scripture says that his strength was still there.

Yet no matter how long we live none of us knows when our number is up. Yes, we can plan ahead with insurance policies, savings, investments and pensions, but we know that there are no guarantees!

Jesus's own life was short. Why?

His life did become less certain when he took on the status quo and argued for the poor, the disposed, the muleteers and prostitutes who had all been classed as sinners and written off. When Jesus took up their cause it ended in his crucifixion by the authorities.

Jesus grew up in the Middle East which has always been a killing field as it is today. A dark uncertainty seems to thrive in the Middle East.

Jesus values were totally different from the times he lived in. He asked his contemporaries to love their enemies and that did not fly. Today that would be like asking the Palestinians or the Jews to love each other- a total non starter, even if it is the right thing to do.

Can you imagine Hamas having mercy?

Has the Israeli response that has bombed civilians been in any way merciful?

You know it has not.

The context that Jesus knew was remarkably similar to the one we find today.

Palestine was under the boot of Rome and violence was everywhere. Vengeance for insurrection was immediate and bloody. So, it is all the more amazing that in that context of uncertainty, Jesus taught his followers to take no anxious thought for tomorrow.

Was he mad or just unrealistic? And how did that teach his followers to deal with uncertainty?

Here is how he gets there:

He asks us to answer the question, “What is important?”

He argues that the answer is not physical security that ends up with lots of clothes and tons to eat. He says: Surely life is more than that!

He asks, “Does worrying work for you? Can you add to your lifespan by worrying? Answer? No. Life is uncertain. Worrying in itself does not clothe or feed us. So what good is it?”

God clothes the grass and grass does not worry. It lives. It thrives. It dies. And God sees that. He says, “You are more important than the lilies of the field and the birds to God, yet God sees each sparrow fall.

His answer? What we need to handle uncertainty, rather than worry, is FAITH!

People who don't ‘get God’, worry about material things. But Jesus says, God knows what we need. We are not to be like those, who don't “get God”.

He says that it is hard for rich people who think materially to get into the Kingdom of God. It's like trying to get a heavily laden camel to go through the needle gate in Jerusalem. It is possible, but very difficult...you have to get everything off the camel first.

But Jesus counsels us the way to get our values straight: he says: **Get your heart involved.**

How do we do that?

In Matthew 25 Jesus tells his famous parable about the sheep and the goats. Its all about life values, lived from the heart!

People who think that they are religious may fail certain tests says Jesus.

When people are hungry, these pious folks pass them by. When they are in need of a drink of water, they pass them by. Many of our native peoples don't have clean drinking water. For a very long time people have passed them by. When religious people run across strangers they often don't think to welcome them. I remember one dear woman in Knox who resented that new people were coming to church. She said, “Don't they have churches of their own to go to?”

There is a huge crisis in our world of refugees. Who is going to accept them and look after their needs? Who is going to care enough to help them find clothes and shelter?

I was outside a prison when a man was released. He was homeless and had no clothes. So, what did the prison do? They released him in paper pajamas with no shoes. They had learned that it is alright to pass by on the other side.

And who are these people who pass by on the other side according to Jesus? The virtuous! They are not the ones in jail. They are the good people!

When they were judged for passing others by; when they were judged for treating needy people this way, when they were judged for passing Jesus by in his need, they asked: When did we see you Jesus as a stranger, or sick, or in prison? If we had known we most certainly would have been there for you Jesus, say the virtuous, the good people.

But Jesus says: In so far as you passed by any person in need, you didn't do it for me...

*Is there is a way to live which conquers uncertainty.?*

Yes, according to Jesus, life can be worry free! And that freedom always happens when we are on a mission.

We all know the feelings when we are really engaged in a good cause. Time flies for us. We are enthusiastic and cheerful. If we love our neighbors as ourselves, everything starts to fall into place. Our money follows the mission, in our lives and in our churches.

The Good Samaritan, in Jesus' parable, seems to be well enough off. When he looked after his neighbor on the hazardous Jericho Road, he had the money to be able to do that. He had medicine and health care! He had transport. He had the means to pay the Inn keeper even if the bill ran over. Why?

**Because he was on mission!** And God looked after him because of that.

Uncertainty had become unimportant to the Good Samaritan. It was just a fact of his life. The notorious Jericho Road was an uncertain thing

alright as the poor Jew who was robbed found out. But the Samaritan who was on mission, was on that same road, being compassionate anyway! Was he aware of the dangers? Was he realistic? Was he courageous? Was he compassionate?

YES!

One of the things we do here at Knox impresses me. I have seen women who need a wig, due to chemo for cancer, leave these premises deeply grateful with a wonderful smile on their faces. That is mission.

One morning a certain Helen Bubce was in a church listening to the children's story. She did not have a sense of mission when she came in, but after the children's story she knew what her mission was. It was to knit mittens for children who were without them.

She knitted over 100 sets of mittens and hats every year. She had heard in that first story that there was one child with cold hands who did not receive mittens because there were not enough. So, every year after she had made quota, she knitted one more pair for that one child left behind, to take the uncertainty out of that little life of having cold hands...

She did this for over 20 years. She always did it anonymously. She really felt that God wanted her to do this and would look after her so that she could do this, and so the worry left her life. She was on Mission!

Over the years people became curious. Who was the person who knitted all these mittens anonymously? Still Helen kept her secret. Finally in the last year of her life Helen consented to have her identity revealed.

She was now 86 years old, in church in a wheel chair for her joints were arthritic and her bones brittle. Her daughter was holding her hand, as her identity was revealed.

The members of the congregation began to applaud, then rose to their feet and gave her an ovation which lasted for a full five minutes. At last, they were able to thank her.

Helen died soon after. She always left her needles in yarn because she always started a project before finishing one. But at the end her needles were wrapped with a rubber band and placed in a yarn, empty for the first time in over 20 years. Helen's work was done. She died on mission!

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Sometimes in a life of compassion dedicated to others the shoe is suddenly, unexpectedly on the other foot. We receive back the compassion we have given.

And when is it most appreciated? **In a moment of great uncertainty.**

A single mom of four writes:

On the way home from work every evening, more often than not, there would be a homeless man standing at the exit of a super highway. He looked like he was in his 40's, but he was probably a lot younger.

His eyes were his most striking feature. They were brown and had a sparkle, like an inside light that was beaming out of his eyes. He always was happy and smiling and sometimes dancing. He was not worried. He was happy in his uncertainty, because he knew a secret. He knew in his own way to Seek first the Kingdom...

Every day after work this single mom would remember to gather any spare change and put it aside to give to him if she saw him. A feeling of joy would come over her every time she saw him as she came off the ramp. He had that effect on her.

She would quickly roll down her window and give him the coins. Occasionally the red light would be on for a minute and they would ask each other about their day. His answer was always the same: "I am blessed!"

She knew what his answer was going to be every time, yet she would still ask.

It amazed her that in his situation of being homeless, his life full of uncertainty, he was so positive. His answer would remind her of how blessed she was as a single mother of 4 amazing kids, with a place to call home and with a job to provide for her kids.

But one day she was called into the boss's office and was told that she was being laid off due to the economy. A feeling of worry engulfed her and for the rest of the day all she could think of was "How am I going to pay the rent, how am I going to provide for my kids, what am I going to do?"

On her way home she was sad and upset. She didn't remember to look for the spare change and keep it ready like she usually did. She wasn't feeling the joy as she got off the ramp where the homeless man would be.

Yet there he was. He set his eyes on her, while still waving and smiling at others.

She hoped to catch the green light, but missed it. While she was waiting, he strolled over to her car. He had a big smile and sensing something wrong he looked her straight in the eyes and said: "Today I will give you a dollar." He then reached into his pocket and pulled out a dollar bill.

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She was blown away. She burst into tears. She wanted to jump out of her car and hug him.

She realized that he had given her far more than a dollar bill, he had taught her a valuable lesson. No matter what is taken from you, no one is able to take away our choice to be joyful. Her drive home was smooth sailing. She had lost her job; she had no savings, but knew she was blessed! She said: "Every time I am faced with challenges, I think of the homeless man's valuable lesson and remember that I am blessed."

Are you anxious today, or are you on mission? Amen.