

A Sermon Preached
by the
Canon for Global Justice and Reconciliation
At Washington National Cathedral
25 May 2008 (8:45 and 4:00)

Matthew 6:24-34

The Gospel for this morning is full of contradictions for all of us on how we live our lives. The thrust of Jesus' teaching this morning is do not worry, but I doubt if that there is one person in the Cathedral this morning who is not worried about tomorrow.

Every single day the price of oil is hitting new highs. We saw on CNN this last week a Shell station in California which is now selling gas at \$5.18 a gallon. Last Friday the BBC reported that gas prices at the pump in England is as high as \$13.00 a gallon. Whoever thought that a barrel of oil would cost \$100.00, much less \$135.00 and now many economists are letting \$200.00 trip off their tongues as if \$200.00 a barrel is already a reality.

American Airlines announced this last week that they are going to start charging \$15.00 to check one suitcase and \$25.00 for the second. This last week at the World Economic Forum in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, the President of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak, spent most of his speech lamenting the shortage of food. Debates are now taking place in this country over the wisdom of converting grains into fuels so we can drive our SUV's. The litany of the food crisis, in this country or in developing countries, only gets worse.

Certainly the problem which Jesus addresses in the Gospel is as timely today as it was in the first century when Jesus spoke to his disciples. Maybe even more so! And I suspect most of us do not really believe Jesus' words, any more than those words were heeded by the multitudes in the first century.

What is Jesus saying to us when he tells us "not to worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear, is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?"

Is not Jesus asking us the most fundamental questions in life? Is not Jesus really taking us back to the basics of what is really important? We live in a society where branding and spinning are everything –not the essence of what is really important.

I truly believe that Jesus is calling us to repentance, to turn around. Jesus is not saying that we do not need to eat, that we do not need to drink, that we do not need clothing to wear. Just the opposite. Jesus tells us that our "Heavenly Father knows that we need all these things. "But strive first for the Kingdom of

God and God's righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." The question is how do we strive first for God's righteousness, how do we live in community, how do we respond to our brothers and sisters in this city who literally have no food to eat? How do we respond to our brothers and sisters in this country who have nothing to wear? How do we respond to our brothers and sisters in the global community in which we live who have no water to drink?

These are the questions that Jesus is asking. Should these not be the concerns of the community --- and might I be even more blunt, should these not be the concerns for those of us who confess Jesus Christ as Lord of our life? How do we as Christians respond? And this is not simply a Christian "thing" -- because this is the basic tenet in Judaism and Islam as well

The Gospel for this morning is about being "contra-cultural". In the Lord's Prayer just a few verses before the Gospel appointed for this morning, Jesus prays 'Your Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.' Jesus calls us to live here on earth in that perfect vision of heaven, or as we remember Jesus saying in the High Priestly Prayer, Jesus intercedes for us "because we belong to God." We belong to God. We do not belong to the world, or as Jesus says in the Gospel for today, "No one can serve two masters, for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You can not serve God and wealth." We belong to God.

As God's own, we are called upon to serve God. Not the world, but God. How do we understand Jesus' words on this Memorial Day weekend? Tomorrow this nation remembers its fallen from all the wars in which this country has fought. We remember those who died in the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Mexican-American War, the Civil War, the Spanish American War, World War I and II, Korea, Viet Nam, Iraq I and Iraq II. Today we remember those men and women who have given everything that they have, their lives, to support our government's participation, or initiation, in conflicts and wars that would take them to a foreign soil to sacrifice their lives. For many of the millions who offered their lives, their motivations were as pure as Jesus' example in today's Gospel: "Consider the lilies of the fields, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these."

Today is not the day to discuss the pros and cons of war, and in particular the Iraq war, but it is a time to give thanks for the faithfulness of the armed forces and to grieve with all who suffer daily because they have lost a husband or wife, son or daughter, sister or brother, father or mother, lover or friend, in a war that was not of their making, but they were willing to serve when they were called by our government to serve.

The theme of Jesus' message to us today is "Do Not Worry". However, there is a dimension of this "worry" that has gripped this nation. I would like to suggest that since 9/11 this country has been gripped by worry, by fear. And we

have become enslaved by that fear, but Jesus says no: "Worrying will not add a single hour to your span of life."

Two weeks ago the Cathedral's Center of Global Justice and Reconciliation hosted a Jewish medical doctor by the name of Alice Rothchild. During her incredible noon brown bag lunch presentation she spoke about the fear between Israelis and Palestinians. I would like to quote a couple of sentences from Rothchild's book Broken Promises, Broken Dreams, that can easily be translated from the Palestinian/Israeli conflict to the fear we are living through today in this nation.

Rothchild writes: "An important part of my education has involved crossing lines, traveling, working and listening in Israel and then crossing over to the West Bank and Gaza and experiencing daily life as faced by my Palestinian colleagues. I am not speaking of metaphorical lines in the sand, but rather jagged, dangerous lines of raw emotion and sharp-edged barbed wire. I am repeatedly struck by how Israelis and Palestinians suffer from fear of the other's violence...I have learned that each society has a long history of trauma at the hands of the so-called "enemy", yet the current balance of power is hardly equal, the suffering hardly the same." (p.103)

It is indeed contra-cultural to be an Alice Rothchild today, but as a Christian, I believe that is what we are called to do, just as Rothchild has done being influenced by her Jewish tradition.

Archbishop Rowan Williams perhaps said it best following 9/11 attacks when he himself experienced that tragedy first hand. Archbishop Rowan asked, "Do we really believe that Jesus calls us to be contra-cultural? Do we really believe that we are called to speak and live a language that is God's language? Not the language of revenge and retaliation, but a common language, "by God sharing with us the language of terror and death."

Do we really believe we are free to speak God's language?

On this Memorial Day weekend, do we really believe that God refuses to answer in the language of retaliation and revenge? Is not the language of God always to "strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well." What does that mean for us as Christians in this 2008 world? We are Jesus' disciples today. We are the hands, the eyes, the feet and most importantly the heart of Jesus today. As the body of Christ, might we, as we read the Scriptures, and as we are nourished by the Eucharist, be devoted only to one Master.

"Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"

In the Name of God. Amen.

John L. Peterson
25 May 2008