

BGCW 8/8/10 Worship Theme: Treasures and Hearts, Isaiah 1: 1, 10-20, Luke 12:32-40

I often come across recently written articles declaring that we live in an “Age of Anxiety.” One of them was authored by business writer, Adrian Davis who defines “The Age of Anxiety” this way: “Predictability provides peace of mind. Uncertainty creates anxiety. We live in an uncertain age. The Information Age is behind us. We are now in the Anxious Age. Despite being the most educated, knowledgeable and well-informed people in the history of mankind, our world is unraveling. It is an Age when nothing can be taken for granted and the past is a poor predictor of the future. Uncertainty around interest rates, exchange rates, unemployment rates, and oil prices, combined with uncertainty around foreign affairs leave us all wondering about our future.” Well said in 2010, Mr. Davis. (Ezine Articles)

But, Jesus, who is God with us, and whom we have confessed as our Lord and Savior told the disciples two thousand years ago something different: “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” He speaks this same message to us today. Well said, Jesus, our eternal Lord and Savior.

We need Jesus to speak to this way to our anxieties that never seem to go away. Some in this sanctuary today were born when World War I was being fought, and along with others lived through the great depression and World War II. I was born in 1947 and along with many have you have experienced the Korean War, the threat of communism, the Cuban missile crisis, the Vietnam War, the explosive 1960’s, the 1970’s oil embargo, Desert Storm, 911, the Iraq War, Afghanistan War , seemingly countless recessions and recoveries, unemployment and personal tragedies. From my perspective, it seems that the “Age of Anxiety” has always been with us in this world, and may well always be with us until Christ returns. So we need Jesus to speak to us about how to handle this ever running anxiety conundrum.

Jesus, on the other hand wants us to hear and follow his directive to us so that we can be relieved of the burden of anxiety that will always be around to annoy us, and

become faithful and productive citizens of the Kingdom of God. Let us hear again his words spoken from before the birth and baptism of all of us. “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” What a heavenly contrast this is to the “Age of Anxiety!” This wisdom is from the one about whom the Gospel of John declares: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” (John 1) Take that “Age of Anxiety!”

What is being offered to us here are choices in how we respond to the life and times around us and to the Lord who creates and redeems us. Which one is our treasure and to whom have we given our hearts?

A similar “Age of Anxiety” was with the people of Judah in 742 BC when their King Uzziah died. He had ruled for 52 years, so the people were anxious and upset about what was going to happen next. The response of the rich and powerful political and religious leaders of Judah of that day was to hunker down to preserve their wealth and power. They focused on making sure they offered all the right offerings to God and held the proper high holy days. They wanted to manipulate God to be on their side in their time of perceived trouble. In the legal courts, they also manipulated the laws and verdicts of the courts to favor them so that they could feel secure by keeping all the wealth and power in their hands. This meant the poor, the widows, orphans and foreigners in the nation were deprived of rights, land, money, jobs, food and left to fend for themselves. The treasure and hearts of the rich and powerful political and religious leaders of Judah of that day were not with Yahweh, but within themselves, for themselves and in their belongings. Anxiety was becoming the god of Judah.

As we heard in Isaiah, Yahweh was very angry over this and rightly so. The Idolatry of material goods and anxious power grabbing was running amuck. The poor and

powerless of his people were being destroyed. Yahweh declared that he hated this idolatry, hypocrisy and anxiety of the heart. He hated that the orphan and widows were being hung out to dry in the destructive winds of poverty and starvation.

Being the same God who gave us his kingdom in Jesus Christ, Yahweh called on these misguided and anxiety filled leaders to live their lives according to his ways. He even gave them the hope of redemption to help this do this. "Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow." God was not just preaching to them about this, he was looking for a tough conversation with them. Yahweh was calling them out to prepare for his intervention to make things right, again. "Come now, let us argue it out, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." This same word of the Lord is spoken to our world, our nation and our hearts today.

Jesus also spoke a similar word right after he proclaimed, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." He warned the disciples and us to be prepared for his return to earth and when he would make things right again. "Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour." Oh great we might think, "We are already anxious enough, now we have to worry about Jesus showing up unexpectedly to do whatever to us!" No! No! No! Not if our treasure and heart belong to him. Not if we are serving him by the generous and wise use of our time, talents, money and belongings so that the poor, the orphans, the widows and homeless are being cared for in his name. When he comes again he will serve those who have been serving him. We should be looking forward to his return, not anxious, because we trust him more than anyone or thing in this world; because we recognize that he has done and will do more good for us than anyone or thing in this world has ever done or will do for us. He has

come to give us his kingdom, let us be prepared to receive it and share it without reservation with others in word and deed.

Jesus calls us to let go of our anxieties, for when we hold on to them even tighter to preserve our lives and goods, it is like attempting to keep toothpaste in the tube by squeezing it harder. It cannot be done. It has the opposite effect. Yes, we have to be wise with our money, goods and life, Jesus would want this, but for what purposes, to serve ourselves, or to serve him and others? Bible Professor, R. Alan Culpepper writes it well: “What greater denial of a life controlled by anxiety could there be than a devotion to providing for the needs of others? If there are only two basic impulses, either to grasp or to give, then the alternative to anxiety over what we do not possess or control is to release our grasp of that which we do control” and surrender our anxieties to the Lord who is really in charge anyway. [TNIBC, Vol.IX](#), pg. 260.

In a very odd and accidental way a man in the following story demonstrated both the preparation Jesus said was needed in the face of challenges that come to us and the letting go of our fears and anxiety.

“In 1998, a series of tornados caused extensive damage in Florida. Many stories circulated about them, but one of the strangest was reported on National Public Radio.”

“Somewhere in Florida there was a man who was deeply and irrationally afraid of water. This fear went way beyond his not knowing how to swim; somehow he was convinced that he would die, one day, of drowning. As a precaution, the man used to listen to the weather report every night. If it sounded like a storm was coming, he’d wear a lifejacket to bed. Everyone who knew this man thought he was crazy as a loon. But, as it turned out, he had the last laugh.”

“When the tornados came, they tore into his home. A funnel-cloud picked the man right up out of his bed, and deposited him in a nearby lake. There he floated for over an hour, before the police fished him out, unharmed. The rescuers testified that, if the man hadn’t been wearing a life jacket, he never would have survived.”

“Maybe he was crazy as a loon — or maybe he was “crazy like a fox.” Whatever odd premonition had led that man to wear a lifejacket to bed saved him on the night the tornados came.”

“There have been many strange things done in the name of security. In Luke 12, Jesus teaches that our true security comes not from the precautions we take to accumulate wealth on earth, but rather from ‘treasure in heaven.’” May we put on Jesus as our life jacket to keep afloat when all else seems to be sinking beneath us.

“Emphasis,” 8/8/04

In this day and “Age of Anxiety” where we continually seek a “financial cushion to catch us;” ‘ a hedge to bet against;” “a stop loss figure we think a stock should be sold at;” “a sure thing like ‘gold;”” “a way to save social security and reduce the deficit;” “a pullout date for the troops;” “the light at the end of the unemployment tunnel;” or whatever cliché we might use for whatever causes us to lose sleep and take anti anxiety pills; the same God who called up the misled people of Judah has come to us to argue things out with us, to clean out our worries and then again in Jesus Christ assure us: “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Listen, I am preaching this sermon to myself more than to any of you, but this is what Jesus wants us to teach in word and deed to young James Griffin Soden, whom we baptized today, and to all of our children. A healthy future for them and for us depends upon where our treasure and hearts are indeed located.