

**Sermon: Rev Susanna Pain**  
**25 May 2008**

Second Sunday after Pentecost

*Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ... But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.*  
(Matthew 6: 25-33)

*I will calm down, quieten my soul  
Like a child resting at its mother's breast  
Like a child my soul will be at peace (Psalm 131)*

Why am I stressed out so often?  
Is it my personality?  
Do I lack faith? Or organisational ability? Or all of the above?

Jesus doesn't promise a carefree existence.

He doesn't say that if you believe in him, you'll never be anxious. Each day brings worries of its own. So what do we do about it?

Jesus suggests that focus on God and God's way is central. Jesus brings a freshness and imagining new possibilities.

I read an article this week which struck me. It's by Richard Foster.

*Focus upon God's kingdom produces the inward reality, and without the inward reality we will degenerate into legalistic trivia. Nothing else can be central. Worthy as all other concerns may be, the moment they become the focus of our efforts they become idolatry. To centre on them will inevitably draw us into declaring that our particular activity is Christian simplicity. And, in fact, when the kingdom of God is genuinely placed first, ecological concerns, the poor, the equitable distribution of wealth, and many other things will be given their proper attention.*

*As Jesus made clear in our central passage, freedom from anxiety is one of the inward evidences of seeking first the kingdom of God. The inward reality of simplicity involves a life of joyful unconcern for possessions. Neither the greedy nor the miserly know this liberty. It has nothing to do with abundance of possessions or their lack. It is an inward spirit of trust.*

*Freedom from anxiety is characterised by three inner attitudes. If what we have we receive as a gift, and if what we have is to be cared for by God, and if what we have is available to others, then we will possess freedom from anxiety. This is the inward reality of simplicity. However, if what we have we believe we have gotten, and if what we have we believe we must hold on to, and if what we have is not available to others, then we will live in anxiety. Such persons will never*

*know simplicity regardless of the outward contortions they may put themselves through in order to live “the simple life”.*

***To receive what we have as a gift from God is the first inner attitude of simplicity.*** We work but we know that it is not our work that gives us what we have. We are dependent upon God for the simplest elements of life: air, water, sun... When we are tempted to think that what we own is the result of our personal efforts, it takes only a little drought or a small accident to show us once again how utterly dependent we are for everything.

***To know that it is God’s business, and not ours, to care for what we have is the second inner attitude of simplicity.*** God is able to protect what we possess. We can trust God. It is only common sense to take normal precautions, but if we believe that precaution itself protects us and our goods, we will be riddled with anxiety. There simply is no such thing as “burglar proof” precaution. Obviously these matters are not restricted to possessions but include such things as our reputation and our employment. Simplicity means the freedom to trust God for these (and all) things.

***To have our goods available to others marks the third inner attitude of simplicity.*** If our goods are not available to the community when it is clearly right and good, then they are stolen goods. The reason we find such an idea so difficult is our fear of the future. We cling to our possessions rather than sharing them because we are anxious about tomorrow. But if we truly believe that God is who Jesus says, then we do not need to be afraid. If someone is in need, we are free to help them. Again, ordinary common sense will define the parameters of our sharing and save us from foolishness.

*When we are seeking first the kingdom of God, these three attitudes will characterise our lives. Taken together they define what Jesus means by “do not be anxious”. They comprise the inner reality of Christian simplicity. And we can be certain that when we live this way then “all these things” that are necessary to carry on human life adequately will be ours as well.*

Copyright © 1978 by Richard J. Foster  
Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers  
*Seasons of the Spirit*™ Congregational Life Pentecost 1 (p.33)  
Learning & Serving May 25-31 2008

What it comes back to, for me, is resting in God – trust in God.

With the Psalmist we can say:

*I will calm down, quieten my soul  
Like a child resting at its mother’s breast  
Like a child my soul will be at peace (Psalm 131)*

I’ve been privileged this week to walk with others on a retreat in daily life. One person I listened to was struck by the phrase ‘womb-space’ of God. We explored this image and I was struck by the fact that in the womb, we don’t need to do anything – we just are and in that space we are fed and nourished and we

grow. We usually think we have to do stuff – a course, exercise, retreat to grow ... but in the womb-space we just have to be. This was a revelation for me, so I have been spending time sitting in the womb-space of God this week quieting my soul and resting. And when I do, the world seems a calmer place – and I find energy to be myself and with others.

Another conversation I was part of this week focused on climate change – and a person's deep concern for the future – for her children & grandchildren. There is anxiety. She is doing all she can – and joining with others to encourage, to challenge, to lobby.

We can focus on the fear, the anxiety or we can bring our concerns before God. Rest in God, trust in God, and from this rest, from this passion, from this love act in the world, doing what we can, and not what we can't, using the energy of love to motivate and guide.

Michael Leunig writes that love and fear are the two basic motivators. Henri Nouwen shares this and encourages us to move into the house of love, to let that be our driver, to place our fear in God's hands, to rest and move forward seeking God's way.

I think of Valerie Browning living in simplicity with her people, speaking of what she knows, advocating, knowing the world is God's and trusting, free from anxiety.

God knows you and is involved in your well-being.

Carlo Corretto (p.30 SoS) writes,

*the thought that the affairs of the world, like those of the stars, are in God's hands, apart from being actually true, is something that should give great satisfaction to anyone who looks to the future with hope. It should be the source of truth, joyful hope, and above all, of deep peace. What have I to fear if everything is guided and sustained by God? Why get so worried, as if the world were in the hands of me and my fellow humans? And yet it is so difficult to hold on to faith ...*

If God is really in control, why do we worry?

Where have I noticed God this week?

In Sally, my cat, curled up on my lap, safe, trusting, secure, warm – loving me loving her;

In the autumn colours – rich orange and golden yellow – a true feast recalling the creativity of the artist – our creator God;

Or the young mum juggling family responsibilities – trying to find God's presence in it all, creating space to sit with God;

In an evening at home eating a home-cooked meal;

In a Parish Council meeting of passion and commitment;

In musicians playing Taizé – followed by a generous meal for 17 – cooked by many loving hands;  
And the goods for Anglicare – 3 trailer loads ...

Playgroup ...

Kay Goldsworthy's consecration ...

In aid workers working in Burma ...

God's presence is all around.

Process Philosopher, theologian, Carol Christ says that:

Every time she sees a sparrow happy outside her window she knows that God delights with her at the sight;

Every time someone suffers God suffers with them;

Every time she is outraged by injustice she is encouraged by the fact that God is outraged with her;

In the chaos of the world there are two things that emerge – chance and choice;

And that every time she chooses to act with compassion, she knows that God acts with her.

What might appear to be one small action thus becomes all important. Such knowledge calms our anxieties and makes us realise that what we do and say and think is important.

*Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ... But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.*

(Matthew 6: 25-33)

*I will calm down, quieten my soul*

*Like a child resting at its mother's breast*

*Like a child my soul will be at peace (Psalm 131)*