



## ST. MICHAEL'S SERMONS

Greenville, SC

The Second Sunday after Pentecost – May 25, 2008

Isaiah 49:8 – 16a; Matthew 6:24 – 34

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### “ANTIDOTE TO ANXIETY”

“Do not be anxious!” says Jesus . . . . “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear.”

But WE say, “Jesus never had a mortgage to pay! Never had children to educate! Never had a retirement plan to fund! And gasoline is \$3.75 a gallon; and the price of crude oil keeps going up; and it is squeezing the entire economy; and nobody’s hiring, and everybody’s laying off . . . . C’mon, Jesus! What the heck are You talking about? This is impossible! We cannot NOT be anxious!”

But Jesus’ original audience were probably more heavily taxed as a percentage of income than we are . . . . And without refrigeration and freezers and great grocery distribution networks, they were probably more anxious about food, clothing, and shelter than we are . . . .

Jesus certainly knows this. About them. And about us. So it becomes even more necessary that we hear Jesus teaching these things, and soak in His words, and seek to understand what this means, and how it works . . . .

Indeed, we are anxious and troubled about many things. We live in an anxious and troubled world. And this anxiety carries into the life of the Church, because we are the Church in the world – and the issues and anxieties of the world will always spill over into the Church. We are the Church in the world; but the world must not be too much in the Church, lest we cease to be the Church.

“No one can serve two masters!” says Jesus. There can be only ONE master! That which we are anxious about has already become our master. That which we are anxious about has already become our “god.” Anxiety is fear. Fear of losing that which is precious and valued, that which we do not want to lose – power and control; independence and autonomy; freedom and security. NO ONE IS ABLE TO AVOID ANXIETY! No one. Not even Jesus. “Lord, let this cup pass from Me,” He prays in Gethsemane. No one is able to avoid anxiety . . . . But NO ONE NEEDS to be anxious! NO ONE! Not you. Not me. Not us. No one need be anxious, because God is already and always in control.

There are many, many other gods out there. “Mammon,” the word Matthew records Jesus speaking in this Gospel text, means far more than just wealth. “In God We Trust” is printed on our money – but who’s the real god . . . ? Sometimes we **work off** our anxiety . . . . But then work becomes our god, and we begin to believe our own self-importance. Sometimes we **act out** our anxiety . . . . And thereby destroy the very community which can save us. Sometimes we **cover up** our anxiety . . . . “The one with the most toys at the end wins!” But then the toys are left behind. Sometimes we medicate our anxiety . . . . And finally discover that although “*Better Living Through Chemistry*” may work as a corporate logo it does **not** work as a personal lifestyle.

No one is able to avoid anxiety. But no one need be anxious. Because God, the Living and True God, is already in control, and always present, and lovingly life-giving to us!

**The antidote to anxiety is this persistent, pervasive, personal presence of our Loving God!** “Are you not of more value than the birds of the air? Are you not of more value than the lilies of the field?” “Children of the Heavenly Father, safely in His bosom gather . . . !” “Can a woman forget her nursing child? Or show no compassion for the child of her womb?” “Even these may forget,” says the LORD, “yet I will not forget you!” The people of God are in exile in Babylon. They fear God has forgotten them. They see absolutely no sign which would indicate otherwise. They are anxious and troubled about many things. The LORD God promises He will keep them together, He will bring them home, He will create a new beginning for them: “See! I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands!”

It was the custom among the Babylonians to mark into their own flesh, to tattoo upon themselves, the names and the symbols of their various gods . . . . Some things never change; make a list of all the tattoos you’ve seen in your lifetime! But this God of grace and glory, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Father of our Lord Jesus the Christ tattoos our names onto His Own hands! Cuts into His Own palms His steadfast, strong love for us! “See!” He says on the Cross. “I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands!” **I will not forget you.**

This is the antidote to anxiety! This persistent, pervasive personal presence of our Loving God, Who is so absolutely committed to us that He inscribes us on the palms of His hands! That He names us in the pierced palms of Christ’s flesh – “once you were not a people; now you are God’s People!” That He marks us with the Cross of Christ in Holy Baptism! That He identifies God’s Own self with us, and then identifies us as God’s Own precious possession! Therefore, “Do not be anxious about your life!” says Jesus . . . . Your Heavenly Father knows that you need all these things, and has already given you the one thing most needful!

This antidote to anxiety is the treasure chest of living faith, filled full of signs and symbols of those times this Living, Loving God has been most clearly and closely present with us, calling us to keep our eyes open in the future to see the presence of this God – Who has inscribed us into His palms!

“Teach us to care, and not to care . . .” prays T. S. Eliot in his poem “Ash Wednesday,” thereby calling us Christians – as Episcopal Bishop Frederick Borsch puts it – to “a careless caring, and a caring carelessness!”

When you see a snake in your yard or a scorpion in your house, often you will turn a bucket upside down over top of the offender. It is still there. It is still potentially dangerous. But it cannot hurt you! Because it is surrounded and covered over by something bigger and stronger . . . .

Just like many of you, I am plagued with allergies all year long. I have an entire box, a “treasure chest” if you will, filled full of various treatments. So do many of you . . . . None of them removes the allergy. The allergy is in me, just like the anxiety is in me. But each of them treats some symptom of my allergic response – so that they no longer get in the way of living life and serving Christ. I know when I need them. I know when I forget to use them. I am thankful to have them. They make my life more abundant.

And so it is with God’s Own Antidote to Anxiety!

AMEN