

September 25, 2016 Sermon by Rev. John Matheson

## Contented Compassionate Godliness

That is the call for today. Be content,compassionate and like god.

Jeremiah's (23:16) advice in an earlier passage... Don't trust the prophet. Too often their word is their own and not God's. That is a humbling and powerful word for someone who was a prophet himself, and imprisoned at the time because the king didn't like his words. He kept telling everyone that they were going to lose. The king didn't like it.

We are constantly exposed to people who want to tell us about the future. We don't mind the occasional mistakes of the weather people but we are quite correctly suspicious of some of the other crystal ball predictors of doom. Instant experts are everywhere and caution needs to be our watchword.

In troubled times, Jeremiah is giving real estate advice. Buy property, he says. Commit yourself to this place for the long haul. Real Estate is a common theme for today's prophets. We have an interest in the advice but we listen with all ears open.

Share the wealth lest the goes around comes around and there really is ultimate justice when it is too late to change. The rich man and Lazarus is another bit of advice that opposes some of what we think about the world. Give it away and share what we have is not the first word we learn. We learn the opposite about getting ahead ourselves first.

There once was a preacher who preach on this passage that the rich should share their money with the poor. Later when a friend asked him how it had gone, the preacher admitted that he had only persuaded the poor.

At the beginning of my ministry there was a popular song called the Magic Penny. "Love is something if you give it away, you end up having more. It is just like a magic penny. Hold it tight and you won't have any. But lend it and spend it and give it away you end up having more."

There is a saying that the two most important days of our lives are the day when we are born and the day when we figure out why we were born.

Canadianfolk singer Penny Lang died this summer and her memorial service was just down the hill at the Unitarian church. Her son Jason led the service and began the tribute part with one of her signature songs. "Ain't life sweet, when we know what we are doing. Ain't life sweet when we are not afraid to care!"

Many of you know that I have just retired as a chaplain in psychiatry. That means that I've known a lot of people who were anxious and worried. Paranoia is a much-overused word. Many times I have explained the meaning by saying that all it means is "more afraid than we need to be". There is room for fear and anxiety but it is not supposed to run our lives. One of Jesus shortest and most powerful sermons is "Fear not!"

Three mini sermons have helped me deal with anxiety in me and others. My favorite is: "**Today is the tomorrow we worried about yesterday, and here we are!**" The second attempt at a comforting thought is that **worry is like a rocking chair that keeps us busy while we wait but doesn't get us anywhere.** One of the first things we bought as a family was a rocking chair and I have spent my share of worry time trying to get somewhere in it. My latest mini sermon may be the most helpful at avoiding needless worry. "**Worry doesn't fix tomorrow but it does ruin today.**"

Politics in Quebec and elsewhere has been swatting at religion of late and it may be overdue time for religion to say a word back to politics. The word is "Stop exploiting fear." Stop exploiting fear for the sake of political advantage. You won't end up with a better society. Religion is not the problem. Leaders without knowledge or wisdom or or courage or direction are the problem.

If anyone anywhere any time in any language says "God's name be praised!" let our answer be "Amen". We know that religion is aiming at compassionate godliness. Compassion is to feel with another. We can easily be moved to pity, even the worst of us. We care about ourselves and those close to us. We won't be the first to ask who is our neighbor, but we will get the answer that others got before us. Our neighbors are those in need around us. It is not that we don't see or notice them. Like the rich man across a great gap we will recognize Lazarus when fortunes change.

Godliness will always bring out the best in us. We might imagine a Zeus getting ready to hurl lightning bolts but our God is the creator, the giver and the sustainer of life. Our God often approaches ordinary and even sinful people with a call and a challenge to do great things to move people out of slavery towards freedom and towards the Promised Land.

Probably the most prominent theme of our news around the world has been about corruption and greed. This week's version was the story where 5000 bank employees got fired for duping the customers. They were fleecing the flock. It is of note that Jesus fed that many people and they all had enough to eat.

We used to sing that they would know we are Christians by our love. Now we can ask that if we were accused of being Christians would there be enough evidence to convict us? So much of our news stirs our hearts. Our challenge is to keep those hearts open as we lift those concerns to God.

In my own coming to faith, the turning point arrived when I realized that many of my attitudes were the same as everyone else. I was a creature of my time and space. This was humbling to me. Many thanks are due to the persistent questioner who kept challenging me to answer a question about how my faith informed my attitudes. The same question is for us today. We are much more than what we hear in the news and we are more than we think we are in our own minds.

If you want to hear God laugh, tell God your plans.

Do you share the same attitudes worries and opinions as everyone else? Unanimous motions have always left me wondering if there isn't at least one person who thinks differently. Our call is to share our word always seeking to be sure that our word is God's word and not just our own limitation.

Does your faith call you to something else? Test all the voices you hear including your own. The only test that matters is whether the words we hear are coming from God or from some other source. Can those words which must be trusted?

Timothy says contented godliness looks like this (**1 Timothy 6:6-19**)

There is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains. But as for you, people of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. Take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession. In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, keep the commandment without spot or blame. It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light. To God be honour and dominion.

As for those who are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

Let us continue to seek that contented godliness. Amen.