

Proper 27 (32) 25th Sunday after Pentecost - November 10, 2024

1 Kings 5:1–6, 13–14; Psalm 72:1–4, 12–14, 18–19; Philippians 4:1–7; Matthew 6:28–34

“Learning from lilies”

1. I have a confession to make, about a pet peeve of mine:
 - a. I don't like it when preachers tell us how HARD it was to write this sermon,
 - i. or how they DIDN'T KNOW how to say what they had to say,
 - ii. or how DIFFICULT scholars over the centuries have thought a passage was.
 - iii. Enough already with the whining, preacher, and preach.
 - b. But for once, I'll break my own pet peeve and say this:
 - i. Today's sermon was either going to be the easiest to write, or the hardest to write. That's a bit dramatic, but close.
 - ii. It didn't help that this week's events confirming the deep social and political divisions in the country created an emotional environment with lots of feelings draining people's energy, a general sense of anticipation of the future (some of it fraught, some of it eager).
 - iii. Another contributing factor was that I had already agreed with the team that I would highlight our upcoming Mental Health Initiative in the sermon so the congregation would know the important work we're planning for next year.
 - c. And God, in God's cosmic sense of humor, made the passage for today to say:
 - i. why do you all worry? Or as in another translation: why are you anxious?
 - ii. WHY AM I ANXIOUS? WHY DO I WORRY? HOW MUCH TIME DO YOU HAVE, JESUS!?! (I have to yell because it's written in all caps, I can show you! 😊)
2. With the help of our Tuesday evening Bible Study focusing on today's scripture, two lessons shaped themselves as we let the passage into our hearts, both of them particularly pertinent to this very real moment in our lives:
 - a. Let God be God. Lean into Community.
 - b. If it sounds like I'm about to give you a two-for-one sermon, don't worry. That's another one of my preacher pet peeves, and I won't break that one, at least not today.
3. I'll start with the second part of it. Lean into Community.
 - a. This congregation throughout its history has been very interested in a proactive, problem-solving kind of approach to physical and emotional needs you have perceived in the community.
 - i. We are rightfully very proud of the many programs and projects which have been birthed here in the church by incredibly dedicated members which have become thriving social service non-profit organizations in town.
 - ii. We are a generous congregation which gives of itself and its financial bounty to projects we create and ones created by partners in town.
 - iii. We as a congregation lean into community to try to address a myriad of issues.
 - b. But what happens if the situation that we face is deeply personal, and it carries a social stigma?

- i. Last year a group of deacons, at the prompting of one of their own members, organically started wondering about how to offer emotional support and solidarity to fellow church members who may be struggling with mental health challenges, maybe in isolation, or in secret, or feeling a sense of shame, or all of the above.
 - ii. This idea called for inviting people to be vulnerable with one another, to trust one another, and to participate in each other's journey as we sought God's love and support to endure the moment, to find growth and healing.
 - iii. The idea wasn't to fill the role of a mental health professional to each other, but rather to be a fellow traveler in the journey.
 - iv. The idea was to be community to each other, out in the open, in a way that pushes aside any stigma about experiencing depression or anxiety or any host of other realities.
 - v. To talk honestly about it, without feeling it's any different than telling a friend that one is going to a medical professional because of a diagnosed broken bone, or a treatable cancer, or depression.
- c. Things were beginning to take shape, and this peer support project was going to be called Heads Up (I love a good pun!), when then God sent us a little gift.
 - i. Well, actually, a \$44,000 grant. The Center for Congregations in Indy was coincidentally offering funding for a Mental Health Initiative, and we applied and got the grant (in partnership with our FPC Church Foundation).
 - ii. Now suddenly our Heads Up initiative had expanded to include Training, Education, Support, and Celebration. In 2025:
 - 1. We'll bring in a nationally recognized speaker,
 - 2. we'll offer a great training: Youth Mental Health First Aid for Adults Working with Youth,
 - 3. we will form peer groups for teens, adults, seniors, caretakers, and people coping with grief,
 - 4. and then we'll have a time of celebration for the church and community!
 - iii. Our Heads Up initiative fits in quite well with the ongoing Mental Health Matters CRH project, and local efforts connected to the National Alliance on Mental Illness.
 - iv. How is that for God-led timing!? God took the passion of our deacons and connected it to larger community efforts.
- d. When there is that worry (whatever that may mean) and the voice of Jesus' rings in our ears "Why do you worry?"
 - i. remember he also told us to "seek first the reign of God and God's righteousness and all these will be given to you all."
 - ii. The community of the reign of God is where the provision will be waiting for us. I can wrap my heart around that.
- 4. Which brings me to the first part of the lesson which the Bible Study group help raise up: Let God be God.

- a. The feeling of anxiety or worry (which in the passage is about the basic needs of food and clothing, but which we can easily extrapolate to any need we might have) and Jesus' guidance to consider how God feeds the birds of the air and clothes the lilies of the field, helps me frame a larger set of questions.
 - i. Maybe, just maybe, we want to have larger control of our lives, of what happens to us.
 - ii. We want to call the shots, and in so doing, feel like we are independent and self-sufficient.
- b. Well, our reality is much more complex than that.
 - i. The election this week clearly showed the country is divided pretty much half and half on issues of national vision, or policy, of interpretation of history, so much more.
 - ii. There has been over the past weeks, and I would dare say months and years, a build up of a general anxiety and worry about just how divided we find ourselves, with the arguments getting nastier at the Thanksgiving table, or the letters to the editor, or the social media posts.
- c. Well, beloved, as I said in my newsletter article: we have work to do.
 - i. That's not a political organizing statement, but a theological one.
 - ii. We have a mandate from Jesus to work for peace, mercy, justice, for the reign of God, or as Martin Luther King Jr. used to say, the beloved community.
 - iii. That same Jesus asked us to love God fully, to love our neighbor, to love our enemy, to pray for those who persecute us.
- d. That's hard. Frankly it all makes me shake like a leaf clinging to a tree in the autumn wind.
 - i. But that's when Jesus reminds us: why worry? Let God be God.
 - ii. We know our assignment to work for the realm of God.
 - iii. Let God manage the rest (even if we are absolutely baffled by how everything seems to be burning, here, and to a devastating degree in Gaza, in Ukraine, in Sudan).
 - iv. Because even in the midst of tragedy, or especially in that moment, our faith is what holds us together.
 - v. And our fear and our anxiety carry no stigma – it's just how things are!
 - vi. But Jesus gently and clearly calls us to care for one another, and to work for God's priorities of justice and love and peace.