

November 24, 2009 Thanksgiving Service
 Joel 2:21-27; 1 Tim 2:1-7; Mt. 6:25-33

God Is Enough

God is enough. That's the message of these Bible passages tonight, isn't it? God is enough.

The prophet Joel in the Old Testament celebrates the promise of an abundant harvest following a period of drought. He tells the soil, the animals, and the children not to fear—God is enough.

Paul writes to Timothy in this New Testament letter to assure him there is one God and one who makes everything right between God and humanity—Jesus Christ--God is enough.

Jesus in Matthew's New Testament Gospel tells his followers, "Don't worry—God provides for even the most insignificant of creation, so how much more will God provide for you." Jesus says seek for God first—God is enough.

Juliana of Norwich, a 15th century English woman of faith, says it well to God in her prayer which we offered in preparation for the reading of the Scriptures this evening.

God, of your goodness give me yourself; for you are sufficient for me. United Methodist Hymnal, "The Sufficiency of God," 495

Do you believe that today? As you sit here this evening and hear this Word of God from the Scripture and offer this prayer, do you believe that God is enough?

What do these texts say about those who really believe that God is enough? The prophet says they don't fear—they know without a doubt that God is among them and they will never be put to shame. What does Jesus say about them? Jesus says they don't worry—they don't worry about what to eat, drink, or wear. Jesus says because they seek God first they know all these other things will come. What about you? Are you afraid? Is there fear in your life? Would you describe your life as quiet and peaceable? Do you worry? Do you really believe that God is enough?

Now don't misunderstand the Scripture this evening. There is a good and healthy place for fear in your life. There is a good and

healthy place in your life for the desire for food, drink, and clothing. The impulse of fear, hunger, thirst, is basic to all living creatures. This impulse is a good gift of God which is essential to survival. So fear in itself is not bad; the impulse of hunger and thirst in itself is not bad. The problem is we are so impulsive. The impulse itself is fine—it's how you control the impulse that is the issue. Do you control your fear or does your fear control you? Do you control your hunger and thirst or do they control you?

Recent studies of the human brain have revealed the part of the brain that is the source of this impulse. This is the more primitive part of the brain we share with almost all animal life. This is the part of the brain that signals immediately when something is wrong—at the point of danger or alarm it takes over for the thinking, logical, reasoning part of the brain and causes you to take immediate action. It is responsible for your split-second reaction to danger. It takes over when there is no time to weigh decisions or consider options; in moments like that it takes control. This is the most primitive and most basic part of the brain. That fear is healthy fear and a good gift of God. The impulse in response to this reaction is vital to life itself. Fear is not the issue. It is how you respond to fear.

The issue is not the impulse. The issue is impulse control. Imagine you are 4 years old and someone makes the following proposal:

If you'll wait until after I run an errand, you can have 2 marshmallows for a treat. If you can't wait until then, you can only have this one—but you can have it right now.

It is a challenge sure to try the soul of any 4 year old, a measure of how adept the child is at controlling impulse. I don't know how I would have done! Controlling impulse is at the root of all emotional self-control. Scientists say if you can control impulse then you are well on the way to getting a handle on this thing called life. Dr. Walter Mischel of Stanford University conducted this test with many 4 year olds in the 1960's and then followed them throughout their lives. In his study he noticed a big difference between “the grab-marshmallow now” preschoolers and those who delayed gratification and ate 2 marshmallows later.

Some four year olds were able to wait what must surely have seemed an endless fifteen to twenty minutes for the experimenter to return. To sustain themselves in their struggle they covered their eyes so they wouldn't have to stare at temptation, or rested their heads in their arms, talked to themselves, sang, played games with their hands and feet, even tried to go to sleep. These plucky preschoolers got the two-marshmallow reward. But others, more impulsive, grabbed the one marshmallow, almost always within seconds of the experimenter's leaving the room on his 'errand.'

Dr. Mischel followed up on these same preschoolers when they were adolescents 12 to 14 years later.

Those who had resisted temptation at four were, as teenagers, more socially competent: personally effective, self-assertive, and better able to cope with the frustrations of life. They were less likely to go to pieces, freeze, or regress under stress, or become rattled and disorganized when pressured; they embraced challenges and pursued them instead of giving up even in the face of difficulties; they were self-reliant and confident, trustworthy and dependable; and they took initiative and plunged into projects. And, more than a decade later, they were still able to delay gratification in pursuit of their goals.

The third or so who grabbed for the marshmallow, however, tended to have fewer of these qualities, and shared instead a relatively more troubled psychological portrait. (As teenagers) they were more likely to be seen as upset by frustrations; to think of themselves as "bad" or unworthy; to regress or become immobilized by stress; to be mistrustful and resentful about not "getting enough;" to be prone to jealousy and envy; to overreact to irritations with a sharp temper, so provoking arguments and fights. And, after all those years, they still were unable to put off gratification.

Daniel Goleman, Emotional Intelligence, Bantam Books, 1995, pp. 81-82

God is enough. Adam and Eve were told, "from this tree you cannot eat;" but they ate anyway. They could just not control the impulse. God went looking for them, "Where are you?" And

when God found them, what did they say, “We heard the sound of you in the garden and we were afraid.” The Scripture says that those who really believe God is enough do not fear, live quiet and peaceable lives, and do not worry. What the scientific community is just now recognizing as a matter of emotional intelligence, emotional growth, the church has known for a long time to be a matter of spiritual intelligence, spiritual growth. The church didn’t really need this scientific evidence to verify this truth of faith but nevertheless the results of these studies should be no surprise to people of God.

Evelyn Underhill in her book The Spiritual Life says

We mostly spend (our) lives conjugating three verbs: to want, to have, and to do. Craving, clutching, and fussing, on the material, political, social, emotional, intellectual—even on the religious—plane, we are kept in perpetual unrest: forgetting that none of these verbs have any ultimate significance, except so far as they are transcended by and include in, the fundamental verb, to be: and that being, not wanting, having, or doing, is the essence of a spiritual life.

Evelyn Underhill, The Spiritual Life, quoted in A Guide to Prayer for Ministers’ and Other Servants, Rueben P. Job and Norman Shawchuck, eds., The Upper Room, Nashville, Tn., 1983

We are sometimes so afraid, we too often worry so much that we give way to the impulse to want and to have and to do while all along we just need to be—to be who we are, to be where God has made us, to be children of God, to be the one who knows that God is all I need. The church teaches you, doesn’t it, to do whatever it takes—cover your eyes, sing, play games, quote scripture, go to Sunday School, get into a small group—do whatever it takes to control that impulse until your soul settles in on the truth.

You know what the basis of the spiritual life is. It is living each day knowing you are constantly held in God’s eternal arms. We spend so much time hoping and praying that God might be with us that we miss entirely that God was already there and is here right now. As Christians we must learn to resist the impulse to want and

to have and to do, resist the impulse to crave, clutch, and fuss after so many things in life. God is enough.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, let the church help you with this Thanksgiving. Let God into your heart that you may grow more trusting of God's care in your life. Give your children and your grandchildren that gift of love which will foster in them a life of confidence and trust.

Before us this evening is a wonderful sign and symbol of the sufficiency of God—a sign that Warwick Memorial Church believes that God is enough. There is good news here. Scientists who study emotional intelligence have found that if you take a very impulsive child and put him in the proper environment with the right community where appropriate impulse control is encouraged and reinforced the chances are that that child will develop a mature sense of balance in impulse control and ultimately make peace with life. Scientists have shown that in such an environment actual chemical changes take place in the brain, the signals are actually re-routed through the more mature and less primitive parts of the brain and reactions to impulse become more manageable and more appropriate. Now its nice to have a bit of scientific confirmation but we Christians have known for a long time what God can do in a heart once it is surrendered to God. Christian conversion and nurture is a gift of God which brings healing and wholeness to life. The Church shares that life. It is the life Christ came to restore.

In this coming blessed season of the year, let the church help you, your children, and your grandchildren. Believe it and teach it—God is enough! Do not fear, live a quiet, peaceable life, do not worry. God is enough! Thanks be to God. William G. Davidson