

Sermon preached by the Reverend Hope Eakins
St. John's Episcopal Church, West Hartford, CT
November 22, 2018 - Thanksgiving Day

[Joel 2:21-27](#)

[Psalm 126](#)

[1 Timothy 2:1-7](#)

[Matthew 6:25-33](#)

"I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink." What a Gospel for Thanksgiving Day! Do not worry about whether the turkey gets basted or the drinks get chilled. Do not worry about the relatives driving over the river and through the woods! Well, those of you who have left your kitchens behind this morning to come here and give thanks are certainly obedient to the spirit of Jesus' counsel not to worry. Yet despite its applicability for the Thanksgiving dinner, this morning's Gospel is not directed to people worried about how to fit three pots into one oven. "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink" is directed to all Christian people who are worried, all who are hungry for food and drink and hungry for peace and love and health too. "Do not worry, do not be anxious," says Jesus, because there is enough."

But is there really enough? Palestinians and Israelis fighting each other in Gaza, *somebody* killed and dismembered a Saudi journalist, and young men will be murdered in Hartford this week. No, there is not enough peace, and we are anxious, Lord.

The hungry still come to soup kitchens, and children die of starvation in Yemen. There are people without work who can't afford a turkey with all the trimmings. There is not enough food, and we are anxious, Lord.

Families gather around Thanksgiving tables and tell their stories and sometimes forgiveness and healing come in the telling, but some families will not be together because they are separated by divorce or hostility. And there are those who will eat alone this Thanksgiving, yearning for someone with whom to share their life. There is not enough love, and we are anxious, Lord.

We are all anxious. Parents worry about their children and children worry about their parents. Employees worry about their jobs and employers worry about their business. Preachers worry about their sermons, and if God worries, I'll bet God worries about preachers. Jesus knew how anxiety worries its way into our souls and consumes joy. He knew his disciples had left their jobs and families to follow him, and so he reassures them and reassures us, "Do not worry, do not be anxious."

We are sometimes savvy enough to recognize that worrying about today can paralyze us and keep us from being joyous and bold, that worrying about tomorrow can rob us of today's pleasures, and that worrying about the past is faithless and futile. Jesus says that worry does more than that: it keeps us from God. When he called the disciples "men of little faith" he was saying to them, as he says to us: I know that you are weary and heavy laden. I know that you are anxious about your health and your family and your job, but you don't need to be because I make you a promise. I don't promise you a new car and a roast turkey and a diagnosis of benign, but I promise to be with you, no matter what. In the end, that is all that matters. There will never be enough food or health or peace or love in this world, for like the Israelites, no matter where we are, we are wandering in a wilderness.

The Israelites were able to keep going in their wilderness because they had signs of God's promise and signs of God's presence. They had a pillar of fire to light their way and manna to feed their hunger. We have no less today. That good land is in sight. We have signs of the land of milk and honey where we will ultimately lack nothing. We can see it where the hungry are fed at this table with Christ's body and Christ's word. It can be seen where people serve turkey in soup kitchens and stand by sick beds, even when there is nothing they can do there but offer silent strength and silent love. It can be seen wherever families celebrate love rather than remember hate. This good land is where promises of fidelity outweigh the attraction of lust, where racism gets forgotten in celebrating that we are all brothers and sisters.

Christians are not to be Pollyannas, denying the cries of the world's need. Nor are we to be stoic, waiting for a someday pie-in-the-sky heaven. Christians are to be faithful pilgrims, trusting that we are on our way to a good land, and that we can't get lost because God is with us on our way. We really can bear all things and believe all things and hope all things in our wilderness because the wilderness is where God promises to be. As a matter of fact, maybe we discover God's promises most of all IN the wilderness where hunger is fierce and fear destroys sleep. The Psalmist knew this when he wrote, "Yea, though I walk through the shadow of death, I will fear no evil because thou art with me."

It has been true in my life: when life looked grim and fears rocked my heart, when I ran out of ways to “make things all better,” when I had nowhere else to turn and turned to God, I have never been disappointed. For into the emptiness and uncertainty, the anger and confusion, “the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion” in new and surprising ways, and I found it true that “those who sow with tears reap with songs of joy.”

So in the custom of this day we will give thanks for abundance, for health, for our nation, for our families, and we should do so because we are richly blessed. But even were we to lose all of those blessings, we could still give thanks for a God who is always with us, saying, “Do not fear; I am with you.”

There is only one catch. We are not promised freedom from anxiety for our personal happiness. God has bigger things in mind. Freed from worry, we are free to take on God’s concerns, God’s desire that we care for orphans and widows in their affliction, that we work for justice for ALL God’s children, that we make peace in our hearts, our homes, our world. And when we do those things our mouths will be filled with laughter, and our tongues with shouts of joy, and we will see that those who go out weeping, carrying the seed, will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves.