

The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
August 10-11, 2013
Luke 12:22-34

“Signs of the Church: Peace”

Today’s message is going to begin with a little game. I’ve got some items here, and I want you to tell me what they are signs of. I’ve got an umbrella, a bucket and shovel, boogie board, sun glasses, sun screen, chair, etc. Have you figured it out yet? These are all signs of the beach – things we use at the beach, and that’s a great place to be in the summer. Baseball cap on my head, shades on my eyes, sun screen on my skin, book in my hand – this was me on the beach recently. My family and I enjoyed some vacation time at Chincoteague Island – first time for us to visit this place on Virginia’s eastern shore, and it was great. And yes, we saw the wild ponies that Chincoteague and Assateague are famous for. There is something very peaceful and relaxing – something very healing – to be at the beach with the salt air and crashing waves. Sitting there at the shore, I just closed my eyes and listened: the sound of the ocean pretty much drowned out the noise of other beach-goers. In my mind, I’m still there! All the anxious cares and worries that a person carries around sort of melt away, at least for a while. Over the summer, we are focusing on signs – not of the beach, but of the Church. So far we’ve looked at signs within the Church, the Body of Christ, like witness – pointing others to Jesus, compassion – God’s mercy toward us in Christ Jesus that moves us to show mercy to our neighbor, hospitality – extending Christ-like warmth and welcome to others, prayer – communicating to God in Jesus’ Name, and generosity – not grabbing up but giving out. In today’s Gospel lesson, we are given another sign of the Church, and that is peace. That is the theme for the message today. May the Lord’s rich and abundant blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word for Jesus’ sake.

Today’s Gospel lesson begins with Jesus telling his disciples and us: **“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing”** (Luke 12:22-23). To be sure, some may be fretting about food and clothing – those are real needs. There is a whole lot more for us to be anxious about, isn’t there? The temporary closure of U.S. embassies and consulates across the Muslim world last week is a grim reminder just how tense and edgy things are in the world today. Scan the headlines or watch the news on any given day, or consider your own life. What’s going on that has you anxious, worried, and concerned? What keeps you up at night, causing sleeplessness: family matters, work or school concerns, financial challenges, health issues? It’s not just adults that are plagued with this kind of stress. Kids and young people suffer acutely from stress and anxiety, robbing them of the joy of life before they’re even adults. We know from our own experience how this works and how it plays out. We try to push the worry and anxious thoughts out of our mind. We try to get rid of them, but somehow they always come bouncing back. And the net effect? It shows up in our face, in our voice, in our body. Stress-related things set in: depression, high blood pressure, cutting, self-medicating through drugs or alcohol. Jesus’ question is a good one: **“And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?”** (Luke 12:25). We already know the answer. Far from adding to our span of life, anxious worry subtracts from our span of life.

Into our anxious and worry-riddled lives Jesus enters with his blessed peace – that peace which passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7), that peace which the world cannot give (John 14:27). The peace which Jesus brings is not based on material things that pass away – enough money, enough insurance, enough IRAs, enough good looks. All of these things can be taken away at any moment, and then what? True and lasting peace is not based on things, but on the sure promises of God in Christ Jesus – his humble birth in Bethlehem, his life of ministry, his innocent suffering and death, his glorious resurrection from the dead, his fulfillment of all that had been written in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms (Luke 24:44). Peace is not found in things, but in a Person – Jesus Christ, and he himself is our true and lasting

treasure! He invites us to look at things in the world around us – things that we see in this summer season: the birds of the air and flowers of the field, remembering how God provides for them. And if God provides for them, how much more will He provide for us, his beloved children – people for whom his only begotten Son shed his blood and gave his life!

Brothers and sisters in Christ, why do we worry? Why do we fret and fume over so many things in life? Why are we so consumed about things over which we have no control? The question for us is this: will we let God be God? Will we let God, the Maker and Owner of heaven and earth, be in charge of our lives? He wants to be, but will we let him? There is more than a little connection here with the First Commandment, **“You shall have no other gods before me”** (Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 5:7). When we are eaten up with anxious worry, what we are saying is this: “God, I don’t believe you’re capable of handling this. I’d like to put my trust in you, but I don’t think I can. I’ll have to take care of this myself.” And that, my friends, is idolatry. We’ve dethroned God and erected an idol in his place just as sure as the Hebrews of old erected a golden calf and worshiped it (Exodus 32:1-35). How are we who are called by Christ’s Name going to be a sign of Christ if we’re wracked by worry? How are we going to signs of Christ, that city set on a hill which cannot be hidden or that lamp on a stand (Matthew 5:14-16), shining with his love and peace, if all others see in us is anxious care? My friends, there is a better way.

Jesus tells us, **“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”** (Luke 12:32-34). There will always be things in this life that we can fear, that can cause us worry and rob us of that fullness of joy which Jesus came to bring (John 10:10). Since we have the assurance from our Lord Jesus himself that the Father is giving us his kingdom, then our future is secure. No matter what happens in life, the kingdom of God is ours through the blood of Jesus. There is peace in knowing this – peace in Jesus and through Jesus. This peace which passes all understanding sets us free to let go of things. Possessions that somehow have come to own us can now be released and shared with others, especially those in need. And in doing so, by entrusting ourselves to the Lord, we get something even better than time at the beach: God gifts us with blessed peace in Jesus our treasure. Amen.