

Pastor's Message – 11/21/2021  
Thanksgiving  
Joel 2:21-27; Matthew 6:25-33

I know I've talked about ear worms before. You know, those songs that get stuck in your head and you realize you've been singing them or humming them for a while – not always knowing where they came from and not able to get them out of your head. Those happen to me on a somewhat regular basis and I end up singing them or humming them between the Pastor's Office and the Church Office or into the kitchen or on the way to or from the Church. That almost always happens when I'm in a good mood.

However, there are also times when I wake up in the middle of the night with thoughts that take over my consciousness - worrying about what might be and what might happen. It's those times when I recall the story of the man who was having problems sleeping. He was worried about certain events in his life, as well as troubled by the nightly news. He couldn't sleep because his heart was filled with fear.

One day he shared his problems with a friend. His friend informed him that he never had any trouble sleeping. "What do you do?" inquired the man who couldn't sleep. "Count sheep?" "No!" replied that man who could sleep. "I do something better than counting sheep. Before I go to sleep, I first talk to the shepherd!" He could sleep because he knew that the shepherd would always provide for him, would take care of him, and on this he could count and not worry. In our Bible reading from the prophet Joel, he proclaims a message to the people the Word of God. He tells them that they need not worry because God is in control and that he is about to act on behalf of his people. On this they can count and not worry.

That is easier said than done sometimes. If you are a worrier, you might have the same answer as another man who said, "'Don't tell me that worry does no good. Everything I worry about doesn't happen."

Some of you may be having family over for Thanksgiving and are already working on preparing the perfect Thanksgiving meal – the meal where the food is perfectly prepared. You will have your

finest tablecloth and all your guests will behave themselves. You've honed your recipes and know just how the turkey turns out best. But maybe things won't be perfect.

I came across a little song recently which told the story of the turkey that wasn't so perfect.

My turkey shot out of the oven  
And rocketed into the air,  
It knocked every plate off the table  
And partly demolished a chair.

It ricocheted into a corner  
And burst with a deafening boom,  
Then splattered all over the kitchen,  
Completely obscuring the room.

It stuck to the walls and the windows,  
It totally coated the floor,  
There was turkey attached to the ceiling,  
Where there'd never been turkey before.

It blanketed every appliance,  
It smeared every saucer and bowl,  
There wasn't a way I could stop it,  
That turkey was out of control.

I scraped and I scrubbed with displeasure,  
And thought with chagrin as I mopped,  
That I'd never again stuff a turkey  
With popcorn that hadn't been popped!

Things go wrong in life – sometimes because of something we've done and sometimes because of circumstances beyond our control. We try to have a good attitude, but often end up, instead of asking, "What's the good news?" asking instead, "What's the bad news?" focusing on the bad news instead of the good news.

I wonder if this year, and maybe over the past two years, during this Thanksgiving week, if we couldn't ask the first question and, just for one day, or for this hour, not ask the second. For now, take a look

around our world in search of good news and not the bad. I'm not suggesting that we put our head in the sand and pretend we're living in Nirvana or Eden or over the rainbow. I just think that we would do well to think about and thank about the good news.

That's what I think our reading today from the book of Joel is trying to help us do. Yes, there have been bad times... really, really bad times. It's been so bad that even the soil of the earth, the animals of the field, the pastures and trees have been affected. But that was then. Now, the prophet tells them, is a time for being glad and rejoicing.

Time to thank God for the spring rain and the late fall rain. To dance for joy that the threshing floors are going to be full once again with grain and their vats with the finest wine and oil. There's food enough for all and, perhaps best of all, the shame they had felt for so very long is gone forever.

Now that's giving thanks! When God saves, the saving doesn't stop with people, the whole of creation gets in the act. Everything that God created benefits when God saves.

But have you noticed that when practically any group is praying together, a church or a small group or a family; that it's easy to think of things that are going badly and to ask God to intervene. Sickness, poor weather, national and regional disasters, hailstorms and tornados, victims of crime, victims of war... all of those spring immediately to our lips. And, I hasten to add, they should. These are things going on in our world that require God's attention. But when the invitation is given to share words of thanksgiving, the room goes oddly silent. Why is that? Are our eyes closed? Are we not paying attention? Or do we feel a bit silly saying what's on our mind?

Are we really ready to admit that a sunrise took our breath away? Or tell about a simple kindness that a stranger bestowed on us? We might think to give thanks for the birth of a child but forget to thank God for how the little creature smells, or curls its lip, or (you think anyway) recognizes Grandpa's voice. Maybe this year, we can focus on Joel 2.21, "Do not fear . . .; be glad and rejoice, for the LORD has done great things!"

If we would take the time to think and make a list, I would bet that we really have a great deal to be thankful for. Good health,

good kids, a roof over our heads, a few dollars in the bank after our bills, a car that runs most of the time, neighbors who look after our cats when we're away for more than a day, a cozy fire, the crunch of the grass after a good frost, the taste of a fantastic cup of coffee, and on and on. I'm not trying to be silly or cute, there are just so many gifts and blessings to be thankful for, that if we listed them all we would be here for a very long time.

Arthur Gordon was a writer who helped many people on their own spiritual journeys, yet he had his own moments of uncertainty -- even despair. Once he went to his doctor for counseling.

The doctor gave him four slips of paper, a prescription to be followed at 9:00 a.m., 12 noon, 3:00 p.m., and 6:00 p.m. as he took a day off at the beach. At 9:00 a.m. Gordon took out his first prescription. It read, "Listen carefully." He listened to the surging tides, and he began to think of things bigger than he was. At 12:00 noon he opened the second prescription. It read, "Try reaching back." He reached back to happy times, and he sensed a new strength coming to him. At 3:00 p.m. he opened the third prescription; the words read, "Re-examine your motives." He realized his job had become solely a means of making money. Finally, at 6:00 p.m. he opened the last slip of paper that said, "Write your worries in the sand." He wrote his worries in the sand. The tide was coming in and those worries written in the sand slowly disappeared – washed away.

So, maybe just for this week, instead of asking, "What's the bad news?" say to yourself instead, "Don't know, don't care, because I want to bask in the wonderful knowledge that God has richly blessed me and, for these few moments, that is all I need to know."

That's God's message through the prophet Joel today, "Do not fear . . . be glad and rejoice, for the LORD has done great things!"