

2 Pentecost
Sermon for May 25, 2008
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Isaiah 49:8-16a
Psalm 131
1 Corinthians 4:1-5
Matthew 7:21-29

“The internal security level, as established by the Department of Homeland Security is Orange.”

“Do not worry about what you will eat or what you will drink or about what you will wear...”

“Consider the birds of the air, they neither sow nor reap yet your heavenly father feeds them.”

“Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, and yet I tell you even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.”

This is graduation Sunday. We honor those of us who are moving from one stage of life to the next, from home to the world.

Do not worry about the grades you made. Don't worry about the school you're going to. Don't worry about what you're going to do after you graduate the next time. Don't worry about the job you want. Don't worry about how you're going to live.

Don't worry! Since when?

All we do is worry. We worry about our kids. We worry about our family. We worry about our friends. We worry. That's the way we are.

Telling you, any of you, not to worry doesn't help.

I spent a lot of hours in airports this week. Every so often the announcement comes over the loudspeaker. “The internal security level, as established by the Department of Homeland Security is Orange.”

And then comes the caution not to leave baggage unattended. Not to take packages from strangers. Advisories that cars left unattended would be towed away.

Don't worry. All we do is worry. It's not as back as it was. But there seems to be this underlying anxiety that eats at us. Threat levels rise and fall, and we watch the price of gasoline steadily climb. Nothing seems to be solid, certain. Everything seems at risk.

“The internal security level, as established by the Department of Homeland Security is Orange.”

I remember Orange back when my associations with the color was pleasant, back when things seemed easier, more certain.

It brings to mind the fresh, succulent fruit. Reminds me of vacations from my childhood when my parents took us to Florida. There was an orange tree in the yard and when they were in season, as they were when we were there, we picked oranges off the tree. That bitter white stuff under the peel would get on our hands, and the pulp would squirt as we tore into the flesh. The sweet tang of the orange dripped from our mouths as we stuffed too much into our mouths and smiled an orange grimace with the peel of a quarter of an orange held over our teeth by our lips.

But orange now is not a pleasant memory. Orange relates an elevated threat level.

It's an illusion that there was no threat then. The world would unknowingly stand on the edge of global thermonuclear war, and no one would know a thing about it. Now there is always "chatter" and the threat levels will rise.

Don't worry. Since when?

But that is the message of the Gospel today: don't worry; it doesn't do any good. Worrying about your life will not extend it, but not worrying about it could extend your life by years.

Graduates: don't worry. Work hard. Do the best you can. Remember to call home. You are leaving the easiest part of your lives. From now on, it's work – and you're on your own. There's freedom out there: Learn to enjoy it, that freedom is the greatest gift your parents will ever give you.

I spent this past week listening to other people preach the Christian message. I'm sure that what I heard will work its way into my own sermons over the weeks and months to come. One thing I want to share fits this morning.

It's not easy to follow the teachings of Jesus. Like being told not to worry. Doing what Jesus tells us is just too hard. We can't do it alone. But together, we can help each other do better. Together we can support each other. Together we can.

That's what I would urge you graduates to do. Find a community of faith in which you can thrive and grow. That is what it means to be Christian – to be in community. In community there is a reassurance that matters will be better, and there are friends.

Remember your friends. Last week I listened as I watched Boston Legal. One of the characters reflected that we put our work before our friends. Why is that so? It seems, he said, that friendship is like a backyard garden that will always wait until next week, or next summer. Cherish your friends. To quote Ralph Waldo Emerson, "A friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of Nature."