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Matthew 6:25-34

Philippians 3:10-14

IT'S ABOUT TIME: TOMORROW

This is from an artist's journal: "I was walking along a path with two friends - the sun was setting - suddenly the sky turned blood red - I paused, feeling exhausted, and leaned on the fence - there was blood and tongues of fire above the blue-black fjord and the city - my friends walked on, and I stood there trembling with anxiety - and I sensed an infinite scream passing through nature."¹ That is the experience that led Norwegian artist, Edvard Munch, to paint the famous piece from the late 19th century called "The Scream." You may remember Munch's depiction of a person, I guess himself, with wide eyes, hands on the side of his head, and mouth wide open with the deep red sky behind him.²

We are in the midst of a sermon series on time, having focused on today and yesterday over the last two Sundays. It's about time for us to think about tomorrow. Some are filled with anxiety as they anticipate the future. Isn't it interesting that different people can look at the same sky and react in completely different ways? Some can see a totally red sky and react as if there were no tomorrow. Others might pay little attention to it. Others might see the same sky and be filled with awe for their Creator God. A look at the next day on the calendar can fill different people with a variety of responses as well.

In today's world, certain things about tomorrow can be anticipated and predicted. Sunrise tomorrow in our location is predicted to be at 6:11 a.m. Sunset is expected at 7:59 p.m. The day will last 13 hours, 48 minutes and 8 seconds, as calculated for a Philadelphia location.³ The laws of gravity and physics will almost surely operate tomorrow as they have yesterday and today. And yet, even though yesterday's thunderstorms were predicted, we did not

know what their severity would be and where lightning would strike. Even with our scientific instruments and computer forecasts, there is still a level of unpredictability in our fragile state of being. How then do we regard tomorrow?

In his sermon on the mount, Jesus calls upon his followers not to worry about our lives, what we will eat or drink or wear. He says, “Do not worry about tomorrow.” God provides for birds and flowers – how much more will God provide for those who are made in the divine image? Martin Luther, the great reformer, once described his favorite preacher. “I have one preacher I love better than any other. It is this little bird, a robin, who preaches to me daily. I put his crumbs upon my window sill, especially at night. He hops onto the sill when he wants his supply, and takes as much as he desires to satisfy his need. From thence he always hops to a little tree close by, and lifts up his voice to God and sings his carol of praise and gratitude, then tucks his little head under his wing, goes fast to sleep, and leaves tomorrow to care for itself. He is the best preacher that I have on earth!”⁴

I am thankful that the church is able to give some grocery gift cards to people who come to the church seeking food assistance. Some of these people are disabled, some are unemployed or under-employed. I have a job that pays well – thank you - and a bank account - it may be easier for me to have confidence that God will provide for my family and me than it is for others in more precarious positions.

Art historians point out that Edvard Munch’s mother died of tuberculosis when he was just five years old. His older sister died when he was 14. He had another sister who struggled with mental illness. Munch described his father as being temperamentally nervous and obsessively religious, seeking to put the fear of God into him. Even after he had lost his faith, the artist wrote of his terror of an arbitrary and everlasting punishment. Some of us have backgrounds or current situations that make it difficult to entrust tomorrow to God.

The Apostle Paul had been through some very difficult times. However, he was not filled with dread or anxiety about the future - there was room for hope to get a strong foothold within him. In his letter to the Church at Philippi, he turns away from the reasons for religious status that had to do with his heritage and accomplishments. Instead he relies on faith in God through Jesus Christ to gain confidence in God's good intent for him and others, and then to move toward it. As he describes the journey of life, the race he is running, we can sense him leaning into the future with resurrection hope, that for him, defines life in this world and the next.

It is hard to believe that it has been 30 years since Bobby McFerrin first sang to us, "Don't worry. Be happy."⁵ He said, "Don't worry," but he did not offer us a basis for moving beyond anxiety. Jesus affirmed strongly that God is trustworthy, gracious, and generous. With a God like that, our lives do not need to be filled with anxiety as we look at tomorrow or at the time beyond tomorrows. Instead, we are called to strive first for the reign and righteousness of God, and we will be given what we need.

I do not encourage anyone to be irresponsible with the resources placed in their care. We need not test our Lord's providential care by throwing away what we have in order to see if God can meet the challenge of making good on Jesus' promises to provide for our needs. However, we do well to consider what is within our control and what is beyond it. The great theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, wrote what has been labeled 'the serenity prayer' that has blessed many, particularly those in 12-step groups who lift up the first portion of it frequently. "God, give me grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things which should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other." The original prayer continues: "Living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time, accepting hardship as a pathway to peace, taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it, trusting that You will make all things right, if I surrender to Your will, so that I may be reasonably happy in this life, and supremely happy

with You forever in the next.”⁶ Such a prayer to such a God can help us lean forward into tomorrow with resurrection hope that defines life in this world and the next. I don’t know much about that life that has no end of days, but since we have a God who offers us resurrection hope and undying love, we need not be filled with anxiety about existence beyond this earthly life.

None of us knows how many tomorrows we will have. We could assume that lacking that knowledge, it’s not worth the effort to try to accomplish something big in order to shape or have an impact on tomorrow. But the gift of serenity, tied to confidence in God’s good intent, calls us to an active hope as we work in God’s service, in spite of our human limitations. The same Reinhold Niebuhr wrote in another context: “Nothing worth doing is completed in our lifetime; therefore, we are saved by hope. Nothing true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore, we are saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore, we are saved by love.”⁷

Whether we’re looking at a brilliant red sunset, the darkest midnight, or an ambiguous dawn, we don’t have to react with a scream. Even though we don’t know what tomorrow will bring, our loving God does. With tomorrow and with us, in hand, God is ready and we can be too.

¹ Information about Edward Munch is based on [The Private Journals of Edvard Munch](#), Edited by J. Gill Holland, University of Wisconsin Press, 2005.

² <https://www.edvardmunch.org/the-scream.jsp>

³ <https://sunrise-sunset.org/us/philadelphia-pa>

⁴ James Russell Miller, [The Glory of the Commonplace](#), HardPress Publishing, 2012.

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Don%27t_Worry,_Be_Happy

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serenity_Prayer

⁷ Reinhold Niebuhr, [The Irony of American History](#), Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1952.

