

**The Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost, November 5, 2017**

**Solemn Evensong**

**Sermon by the Reverend Stephen Gerth**

*Year 1, Proper 26: Ecclesiasticus 36:1–17; Luke 12:22–32\*; Luke 13:18–21*

Tonight’s second lesson and the reading at Benediction to come, both from Luke, probably are familiar to all of us, because these words are more frequently heard in the form Matthew gives them in the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>1</sup> Luke and Matthew are quoting what New Testament scholars now call the “Sayings Source.”<sup>2</sup>—it was known as “Q” for the German word “quelle,” meaning source, when I was in seminary. The text, of which no copy exists, almost certainly did exist in the classical world. In addition to its use by Matthew and Luke; the passage we heard tonight was also quoted by Justin Martyr, who died c. 167, in a form that suggests he was using the Sayings Source, and not Matthew or Luke.<sup>3</sup>

Luke and Matthew do use the same Sayings Source material, but to different ends. Matthew’s Jesus concludes by saying to his disciples and to the crowds,

---

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 6:25–34.

<sup>2</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2007), 19, 41.

<sup>3</sup> François Bovon, *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51–19:27*, trans. Donald S. Deer, Hermeneia, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 211.

“Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself.”<sup>4</sup> Luke’s Jesus concludes, “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”<sup>5</sup> So two words tonight for brief reflections: anxiety and gift.

Bowen Family Systems Theory has eight formal concepts—and if you’re interested in knowing more, there’s a lot of good information about it is available for free from the Bowen Center website.

Anxiety is not one of Bowen Theory’s eight concepts, but the origin and management of human anxiety, that is, of being unduly concerned, is around every corner, as it were, in human life.

Anxiety can invite over-functioning, and it can invite under-functioning. It can invite us to take responsibility for people and things for which others really are responsible. It can invite us to sit on the sidelines, as it were, and do nothing.

---

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 6:34.

<sup>5</sup> Luke 12:32.

The late Edwin Friedman often connected anxiety in individuals and their families with secrets—about money, love, sickness, accidents, living, and dying. He would readily agree that what was true in individuals and in their nuclear families is also true of every known grouping of one or more people, from a circle of friends, businesses, churches, or institutions of any type.

How problems are faced or not faced reflect the functioning of the people involved. The more composed, non-anxious a person is (Bowen Theory uses the term, “differentiation of self”<sup>6</sup>), the more capacity an individual or a system has for coping with a problem. The more anxious a person or a system, the more quickly it will act to reduce its anxiety without regard to its principles—and often without regard to truth.

The late rabbi and family systems therapist thought learning the truth reduced a person’s anxiety. Secrets, untruths could produce chronic anxiety, and he thought that, [quote] “chronic anxiety . . . kills.”<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> <http://thebowncenter.org/theory/eight-concepts/>, (accessed 9 November 2017).

<sup>7</sup> Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: The Guildford Press, 1985), 53.

I think Matthew had a very strong faith in God's power and love and that Matthew and his community trusted in the power of obedience to be acceptable to God. Matthew's community need not be anxious about the challenges of this world, but only about being faithful and obedient.

Father Smith in his sermon this morning brought out the hard edge Matthew's community faced in the decade after the fall of Jerusalem. The same hard edge is present also in Luke, but he and his community seemed to have had an easier time of it. Luke's Jesus concludes the words about life being more than food and clothing and says, "Fear not . . . it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."<sup>8</sup>

There are powerful moments in each of the gospels when Jesus words are gifts of the kingdom. The wrongdoer crucified with Jesus is the only person in the Luke's gospel that call Jesus by his name. He said, [quote] "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And you know Jesus' reply, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." In the end, I do not believe our weaknesses, our anxiety

---

<sup>8</sup> Luke 12:32.

or fear, can stop God's greatest gift, that is, his kingdom.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Copyright © 2017 The Society of the Free Church of St. Mary the Virgin, New York, New York.

All rights reserved.