

I STILL BELIEVE
Deacon Colleen Spaeth
HOMILY – MAY 25TH, '08

In a Peanuts cartoon, Linus tells Charlie Brown, he is worried. “When I hear those coyotes howling at night, it totally depresses me. I start to feel lonely... Then I get scared.”

Charlie Brown says, “I thought holding onto that blanket made you secure.”
Linus replies, “I think the warranty has run out.”

That’s the problem with most security blankets, their warranty runs out. And then we worry.

The late Erma Bombeck once told about a little guy named Donald. Donald was worrying about going to school. Here is how he expressed his anxieties: “My name is Donald. I don’t know anything. I have new underwear, a loose tooth, and I didn’t sleep last night because I’m worried. What if a bell rings and a man yells, ‘Where do you belong.’ And I don’t know? What if the trays in the cafeteria are too tall for me to reach? What if my loose tooth comes out when we have our heads down and are supposed to be quiet? Am I supposed to bleed quietly? What if I splash water on my nametag and my name disappears and no one knows who I am?”

Poor Linus, poor Donald. Poor us. Worry. We worry about big things and little things. We worry about the future, we worry about the past. We worry about finances, we worry about our family, our jobs, our possessions.

It is people like Linus and Donald and you and me that Jesus once spoke these words:

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“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air, they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not so much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?

“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. Oh, you of little faith?

So do not worry about eating, drinking, what you are wearing. Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself, each day has enough trouble of its own.”

Well, sometimes it's just as clear as mud, that's what I say! Sometimes scripture will just jump out off the page at you and slap you in the face.

One year ago tomorrow a virus attacked my spine. One moment I was getting packed for an overnight at the casinos, a day at the spa, and then gambling away my millions at the roulette table. And then it happened, a pain so pain I could swear I had been stabbed in the back of my leg with a steak knife. The pain subsided a bit, and then a second later I lost all use of my left leg, and the pain intensified again, the steak knife attacked me again.

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What followed was about 70 days of a life I never imagined. When I was conscious it was like I was involved in a drama unlike any I could read about. When the medicine was enough to still the pain, the pain of thinking was almost just as bad.

In the fog I heard virus, we can't figure it out, maybe it's this, maybe it's that, let's work on more pain meds, let's get you some relief... I drifted in and out of whatever reality I could grab hold of. My friends told me I sang bible songs and had my own karaoke party.

When all was said and done, I was told I was a paraplegic, and that was the good news, it could have been so much worse, it could have spread up my chest. And now it was time to figure out a way to get past it all, learn how to drive my chair without hitting anybody, take physical therapy, learn the new rules of the road, and oh, yeah, don't worry, don't worry, don't worry.

Scripture tells us today, "do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today."

How did I survive? What held me together, what was the glue? I am here to share with you today what I have shared before, and will share until somebody says, you know what, enough already! We've heard all about it.

My truth, my experience, is that prayer and love kept me from falling apart. When I felt like crying, even when I allowed myself to have a pity party,

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when the tears ran out, my experience is that prayer and love kept me from falling apart. And when I did fall apart, prayer and love were still there.

When I returned to the church that I love, where I am privileged to serve as your Deacon, prayer and love helped me show up. When I thought I would fall trying to prove how much better I was, when I tried to pretend things were great, prayer and love were my constant. I have been humbled by your stepping out of your boxes and coming over into my space and allowing me to experience your compassion for me. It was scripture in action.

When I couldn't get in and out of my home, a ramp was put up that made getting to therapy easier, while in the hospital you brought me your meals to cheer me up and take my mind off the hospital menu, hundreds of cards, phone calls, visits, prayers and love, laughter. Hugs and chocolate, prayers and love.

And today a year later, I have some really good days, and some not so really good days. But the good news is that I am better, and not one day of worrying made that happen. Some days all I could do was remember that I was doing something I wasn't supposed to be doing, worrying. Some days that was as good as it got.

And now a year later, I continue to remember not to worry, and I embrace the day, each day as a blessing, an opportunity to pass forward that which was passed to me.

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Scripture tells us that if we seek first God's righteousness, we will be given what we need - not immunity to hunger and pain and suffering and death, but confidence in spite of them. When we are detached from God trying to be self sufficient, everything threatens our existence. We are finite, mortal. War or an invisible virus can wipe us out. But we are told Jesus says trust the Father. Your life will get its meaning from the Father.

My guess is that there is someone in this church this morning who needs to heed these words of our Lord. You are literally worrying yourself sick over some situation over which you have no control. You need desperately to stop for a moment and consider the birds of the air and the lilies of the field and turn your worries over to God.

I wonder why we do what we do. It's a natural tendency for sure, but why do we continue day after day to act in a way that is basically harmful to our health? We have a real problem, which alone is enough of a pain in the you know what, but then we add worry onto the problem. It's like being sick and we take something further that can eat out the lining of our stomach, give us a headache or make us tense and irritable. Make sense? Of course not, but yet that is what we do when we have a problem, and then we treat it with worry. We simply add another burden.

And so what's a really cool deacon to do when a nasty unnamed virus attacks her spine? Well, first you worry, then remember you're not supposed to worry, and then when the tears stop – well, you trust. You combine all that is spread on the table each day with trust, with faith, and

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with love. Okay, this is a different day than I envisioned, but it's a day nonetheless, and today I can put one foot, well, maybe one wheelchair, well, maybe one walker, well, maybe one cane in front of the other. But what happens if I fall? Well, I fall, and reach out for whoever can pick me up. And someone has always been there who is willing to pick me up. And you grab ahold of all the props you can! (Show the props) These are what held me together, and still to this day, when a cloud threatens my enjoying the day, I remember how I believe in love. Grace Church is truly a community that puts scripture, faith and trust in God into action. I have been humbled and privileged to be a recipient of those actions, the warranty has not run out. It never does with God.

I believe in a God of never ending love, I believe in a God that places us into each other's living rooms, as well as hospital rooms. We are a community, we are one.

So when God makes lemons, yeah it does sound corny, but you can make lemonade, you can believe.

There's this saying that was all the rage not too long ago – Don't worry, Be happy! I never really liked that saying, Happy – what is Happy anyway? What if we were just went with Don't Worry – Just BE !

Let's try it – let's just take a deep breath – sit for a second, JUST BE !

How does that feel? Just BE.

(End of 8a; at 9:30 play I Still Believe – have everyone dance!)

Amen.