

*For John Allen Guess Cantor on the day of his baptism*

These verses from Matthew have particular meaning to me. I remember when I was in high school, living with a lot of anxiety, that just to be able to face each day, I would wake up, have a cup of coffee, and read these words of Jesus: **do not worry**. I did this for much of my senior year; it was my spiritual discipline. These words are both a comfort and a challenge; they are comforting because they remind us that our lives are in God’s hands and they are challenging because they call us to live lives of trust.

Jesus says, “Look at the birds, they neither sow, nor reap, nor gather into barns, yet God feeds them.” A pastor sent me a You-Tube clip about this text. It shows the birds in her backyard in British Columbia feeding from her bird feeder on the patio. It was beautiful and serene with the snow and the birds fluttering around the bird feeder, and it also reminded me that sometimes God needs us to put the bird feeder out there so the birds have something to eat. We may be God’s way of feeding the world.

Just before Jesus’ words of comfort and trust is the verse about serving two masters. “You cannot serve God and wealth.” This verse has made many Christians, including me, uncomfortable. How much wealth is too much, especially if we are Christians living in America?

Hal and Agnes gave me a book last week by Jim Wallis called **Rediscovering Values**. Jim Wallis is a preacher, a speaker, and a teacher of religion and politics as well as being the CEO of *Sojourners* magazine. He is a Christian committed to social justice. In this book, Wallis describes the Great Recession we’ve been in — how we got there, how we might find our way out, and how through this process we might rediscover some lost values. Here are a few titles from the Table of Contents: **When the Market Became God; Greed is Good; It’s All About Me; I Want It Now; When the Gaps Get Too Big; Enough Is Enough**. Wallis contrasts the values that led us into the great recession with the biblical imperative of God’s economy as described in both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures.

He laments that we don’t always remember (if we ever knew) the Bible stories that teach us God’s dream for this world and all its creatures. He says that the great Old Testament prophets came to Israel when the gap between the haves and have-nots became so wide that it became abusive. He writes: **“We have often been presented with a false choice: between a dull, drab, and deprived life or one of opulence and greed. Given our painful experience of the Great Recession, it’s time to learn again that true freedom lies somewhere in between, where enough is enough. Our credit cards have become our chains and our debt our prison. We don’t have to all become monks; Jesus always enjoyed throwing a good dinner or party--he just wanted to make room at the table for those who weren’t usually invited.”**

Everyday we face a bombardment of advertisements as well as celebrities who are held up as heroes constantly suggesting that what we have is not nearly enough and that we should indeed worry about what we wear and eat, and we should constantly strive to acquire more.

Our culture’s values over the last few decades have changed from family and community welfare to finding meaning and excitement in buying and consuming cheaper and greater stuff. Wallis cites evidence that **“just before the Great Recession began, a full 70 percent of our economy was consumption-driven.”** This compulsion to create an economy based on buying stuff and going into debt took hold of the hearts and the attention of many people. The truth is

that the earth is not ours to consume: “*the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.*” Everything belongs to God. And all that we are is placed in trust, in God’s hands. The world says “*Please worry!*” Jesus says: “*Don’t worry.*”

So what does all this have to do with this beloved baby we just baptized? Actually, quite a lot. History tells us that the native Americans made decisions based on how those decisions would effect the 7th generation to come. Long before them, Hebrew law mandated that the land lie fallow in the 7th year, that people rest and be restored on the 7th day, and one reason was so that people would have time to be in relationship with God and with one another — a time to consider the lilies, the beauty of creation—that comes about regardless of our efforts. This beauty is outside the reference of an economy of consumption.

Today we as church made promises to John Allen; we promised to guide, teach, and be part of his growing up in the church. What if all our decisions would be made asking how they will effect this child and all children, and all people of the 7th generation to come? And because we love John Allen, our decisions about how we use all our resources are focused for his future and for the 7th generation to come. And because we love John Allen, perhaps we should keep the Sabbath and leave time and space for putting love first in our lives.

And because we love him, perhaps we should pay attention to how we live our lives so that we model when enough really is enough, so that he will see lives of purpose and meaning, not lives that worship the rat race of consumerism. Because we love John, let’s show him the lilies and the birds and how human beings can live from a center of trust rather than out of insecurity and fear.

Today’s lesson is pretty clear: “*No one can serve two masters.*” Either God has our devotion or something else does, and there are many other masters that tempt us — the markets, power, wealth, fame, and so on. When our master is *the other*, we are worshipping an idol; the idol becomes that to which we offer our hearts, our time, our devotion.

Finally, Jesus says: “*And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?*” Jim and Judy are back from memorializing Jim’s younger brother, Chuck, who died at 62 years of age from a heart attack while on the golf course. Chuck had worshipped with us, and he was a vibrant man. He and Jim were very close. When a relationship is so tender and so dear, any length of years would never be enough; yet, when a relationship is so tender and so dear, the time with them will always be enough because relationships like these fill our hearts so completely.

Today we hold in our hands this beautiful child, John Allen Guess Cantor, this child of God. He is dependent on us like those birds who are fed because one who loves God puts a bird feeder on the snow-covered porch. John does not know (at least yet) about worry; he hasn’t been overloaded with commercials telling him all the neat toys he must have; he is just held in God’s hands and in the hands of those who adore him. Our children put their trust in us and we cherish them with love and care, and pray that through our love they will grow to know and trust in the Holy One who loves them and us with a great love, a love that knows no beginning and no end. AMEN.