

9th Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 14C

August 10, 2025

Luke 12:32-40

Open Hands, Open Heart

*A sermon preached by The Rev. Dianne Andrews at
St. Barnabas Episcopal Church Bainbridge Island, WA.*

I once visited a wise woman who was living off the land in the 1,000 Islands region of New York, near the Canadian border. Isis was the earthy, sun-weathered, aunt of a friend of mine. Aunt Isis had been raised with great privilege on a plantation in Ocho Rios, Jamaica, in a family whose fortune was made in Pennsylvania steel. In mid-life, Isis gave up the trappings of wealth to live a simple life. It was striking to see this diminutive gray-haired woman standing next to her two humungous oxen who were several heads, again, taller than she was. Isis would rise before dawn to milk her cows. Her days were filled with a routine of chores in a rhythm that was absolutely necessary in order to live off the land in a marginal existence. Aunt Isis made a lasting impression on me. She oozed serenity and had a compassionate presence. What most impressed me about Isis was the advice she offered about dealing with stress and worry. As I was sharing some concerns with her, Isis said, “Dianne, if you are going to worry, do it really well.”... and then she struck a pose akin Auguste Rodin’s sculpture “The Thinker.” She said “When I have a lot on my mind, I set aside 5 or 10 minutes in the morning and have a really good worry. During that time, I focus intensely and chew on my worries fiercely... and then... I get on with my day. ‘Worrying’ has been checked off my ‘to do’ list.” To this day, the image of Aunt Isis worrying makes me chuckle... and I have found that the technique works! It is a reminder not to carry worries, fears and burdens around with me all day. What it doesn’t mean is that my concerns magically disappear or that my problems are instantly solved. It is possible, however, to acknowledge and name one’s fears and worries... to focus on them with great intensity... and then lay them down and let go... at least for a time. To carry that load around all day accomplishes nothing... and it is exhausting.

Jesus said to his disciples, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Fear not, dear ones. The riches of heaven are available to you now... if you do not weigh yourself down with things that have no true value... with things that are nagging distractions. Stop carrying them around! They are a hindrance. If you are focused on counting your gold and jewels... and protecting the rest of your precious possessions in fear that they may be taken from you... your heart will be anchored there with them. Grasping and holding and clinging can squeeze the very life out of us, through the very same channel where joy and abundance seek to enter. If you can let go of your attachments to things and make the turn towards an even richer way of being... if you give, and serve, and live a life of compassion, you will know ever greater freedom and life.

Do any of you know how to catch a monkey? In India, hunters have a tried-and-true method. If you want to catch a monkey, find a coconut, hollow it out, and make a hole that is just large enough for the monkey’s hand to pass through. Then, pin the coconut to the ground and place some of food inside, like nuts or berries. Can you imagine what happens? Attracted by the tasty morsels inside, a monkey will approach the coconut, reach its hand into the coconut and grasp the treat. But there will be a problem, won’t there? As the monkey tries to get its hand back out of the coconut, it finds that its clenched fist is too large for the hole. Its hand is stuck inside the coconut.

Rather than let go of the food, the monkey will continue to grip the treat. Rather than letting go of the treat, the monkey finds itself trapped in place... simply because of the monkey's own inability to let go and release its tight grip. For the hunter... the rest is easy...

There are loud voices in our midst that are spewing messages of scarcity, saying that there isn't enough to go around... that there are not enough places at the table... not enough food for everyone... even though some reports say that in this country... we waste up to 30-40% of our usable food, and more than that is wasted in others parts of the world. There are voices saying that health care is too costly to provide adequate and accessible medical care for all of God's children. Voices of scarcity seek to dominate the conversation with the message that there isn't enough to go around. The Gospel says otherwise...

Fear not, faithful servants... there is a party, a banquet going on and soon the master will return home from the banquet. The master will not judge. The master will, however, be returning at an unexpected time, with a spring in his step... not only to share the joy, but, upon return, to serve faithful servants who are ready to greet the master. Expect the unexpected... for our God seeks... always.... to break us open and free us with joy... to provide a place for each and every one of the beloved... that they may feast at a beautiful and sumptuous banquet table. The message in today's gospel lesson is: do not be distracted, do not cling to fear, or you might miss the party that is promised in the love of Christ. Have your lamps lit. The moment is coming. Let go of your expectations! Fear not! Have faith...

The late Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, Lord Jonathan Sacks, said of our God:

When Moses is standing before the burning bush he asks, "Who are you?"¹ God says to him three words, "hayah asher hayah." Those words are mistranslated in English as "I am that which I am." But in Hebrew, it means, "I will be who or how or where I will be," meaning, "Don't think you can predict me. I am a God who is going to surprise you."

Blessed are God's people when we are ready to receive the gifts of heaven, the gifts of true wealth that are far more than we can ask for or imagine. Together, let us prepare and be ready to receive the riches of God's light and love that is forever and always seek to break through and break us open to newness of life. Fear not, dear ones. Lay down your burdens, unclench your fists, for it is God's good pleasure to surprise us with abundance and joy. Let us light our lamps and make ready for the feast of life.

I would like to end with a prayer by Henri Nouwen:

*Dear God, I am so afraid to open my clenched fists!
Who will I be when I have nothing left to hold on to?
Who will I be when I stand before you with empty hands?
Please help me to gradually open my hands
and to discover that I am not what I own,
but what you want to give me."*²

May God's answer to our prayer be surprise and delight...

Amen...

¹ Exodus 3:13

² Henri J.M. Nouwen, The Only Necessary Thing: Living a Prayerful Life