

**NCC Seminarian Ann Aaberg presented this sermon on Sunday, 21 November 2004 in Marshfield Hills, Massachusetts. It is based on Luke 12:22–31.**

# Taskmasters

MULTI-TASKING IS NOTHING NEW.

Although the use of this phrase has come into vogue over the past several years to describe accomplishing two or more things at once, multi-tasking itself is nothing new. Flash back fifty years.....I remember my mother ironing while the washing machine was spinning, while the supper was bubbling on the stove while one of her ears listened to the Red Sox game on the radio while her other ear tuned in to the high pitch of kid noises coming from outside, while she melodiously hummed "Good Night Irene" through the whole thing! I wonder if she were here today if she would say life was simple fifty years ago. And if we go back further in history, I'm sure we can all come up with more images, like one foot pumping the spinning wheel while the other foot rocked the cradle while both hands were on the butter churner!

Whether we want to blame our complex lives on the recent high tech revolution or go back 150 years to the industrial revolution or a couple of millennia back to the advent of agriculture, we humans have been multi-tasking a long time.

I think we can agree, however, that today's frenetic pace has many of us whirling out of control like no generation before. And while we could spend days discussing why, for this morning we will confine our reflection to what Jesus is trying to tell us and hope for a desperately needed word from God.

Our scripture reading this morning immediately follows a parable we heard on a Sunday last summer – the one where Jesus told us about the rich man whose land produced so much that he planned to tear down his barns and build bigger ones to store all his overflowing crops. Then he could relax because he had "ample goods laid up for many years." God calls him a fool and reminds him that building up treasures for ourselves does not mean we are rich toward God. This parable then prompts Jesus to point his disciples toward the examples of the ravens and the lilies that we heard this morning.

And what a comforting lesson this is! Jesus tells us look at the birds for goodness sake, look at the flowers. They're not multi-tasking: sowing, reaping, toiling, spinning, but God takes care of them. They not only

look healthy and well-rested, they look BEAUTIFUL! He says, don't you realize God will do the same if not more for you?

Remember Bobby McFerrin's song "Don't Worry, Be Happy"? That song was so popular because we desperately want to believe those lyrics, but then something pops up, just as it does when we read this scripture, that thing we call a reality check.

Yeah, right, easy for Jesus to say, but they didn't have cell phones and e-mail in those days and kids then didn't play two sports in between music lessons and homework. I'd like to stop obsessing, at some level I know God will take care of me, but I'm afraid if I let go and turn my phone off for a few hours, or don't check my e-mail today, or go home a little early from the office, I'll lose control and it will all pile up on me anyway. I just need to do this for the rest of this month, or the rest of this year, or til the kids start driving or once soccer is over, then I can relax. Then I'll have enough time, then I'll have ample goods laid up.

But Jesus anticipates our reaction and gives us the zinger – you of little faith. Ouch

You of little faith.

He knows what we're thinking – how different are we than the stockpiling rich man when we're stockpiling tasks hoping to get everything done, because when we're done – well, then we won't have to worry. But in the meantime, we have mouths to feed, and the lawn needs mowing and when was the last time you had the oil changed and wow it's the end of November already.

All these things on our plate are important and they're certainly not inherently bad. As much as we'd like to ignore our economic system, we have to survive in it. We want to take care of our families, we want to give our children every opportunity; in our later years, we want a good quality of life. And we know the phrase "God will provide" has been misused by some to escape human responsibility.

But this is where Jesus knows us better than we realize, better than we know ourselves and gives us the solution: He says do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and God knows that you need them. Instead, strive for God's kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. Strive for God's Kingdom and the rest will fall into place.

This afternoon some of us are coming together to seek simplicity in our lives. While searching for bible passages to help us reflect on simplicity, I found four verses that actually use the word "simple" and it had the same meaning each time.

I did not find "simple" in the Bible to mean uncomplicated or not complex or pure and unadulterated.

Rather, I found "simple" in the Bible to mean easily misled or deceived, having little sense or reasoning ability, stupid or foolish or uneducated or ignorant. Simple. Simple-minded.

And it occurred to me: Are we not taking steps to stop excessive worrying and to live simple lives because we're afraid we'll look like losers? That we'll lose ground, lose time, lose advantage, lose face, lose importance, lose status? Will people think we're simple-minded because we've stopped striving for what the nations of the world strive for and instead are striving for God's kingdom?

How many times have we heard the phrase "childlike simplicity"? And how many times have we referred to ourselves as children of God? Jesus tells us to become like children and I find myself going back to that again and again. Become like children. Simplify.

On the treadmill of this world we run the risk of not only losing our own childlike simplicity, but of damaging that naturally occurring quality in our children as well. Overscheduled, rushing from activity to activity. Believe me, I remember! All of our children belong to all of us. We need to preserve our children as children so that we can remember and recognize what it is Jesus is telling us to become!

Perhaps the answer is in the gratitude that we celebrate this week, when we pause to give thanks for our food, our drink, what we wear. Maybe when we realize just how much we do have already, instead of what we don't have, and that what we don't get done today will still be there tomorrow, and that striving for childlike simplicity may be the same as striving for the kingdom of God, maybe then we'll be able to accept Jesus' loving, knowing advice to stop worrying.

Amen.