

Objects in Mirror Are Closer than they Appear

Easter 4B John 10:11-12

It is still Easter. It may not be Easter Day itself, but the season of Easter continues. Christ is risen, alleluia! And, as an Easter people, bathed and clothed in the waters of baptism, each day is a new start, a new Easter. Christ has given us the victory – his death is ours and because of that, his resurrection is also ours. Alleluia.

And, there is much to celebrate in that. Spring is here, we are celebrating with people in person the gift of Holy Communion for these five precious children of God, vaccinations continue to bring hope and restoration, and the path towards justice for black Americans in this nation seems to be making some genuine strides.

But, today is the last day of Earth Week, too, marking not only our love for what God created to be good, but the recognition of what human sin has done to devastate land, sea, air for future generations. We are still in a pandemic and the fatigue of that pandemic is fully realized. We continue to be polarized and politically opposed in this country, unable to listen and to hear our neighbors with compassion.

Mass shootings and gun violence continue, and there is a 93% rise in the number of people looking for help with anxiety and depression since 2019. There is a great deal of worry in many at this time in our world. Where is Christ in all this? How can we as the people of God be a light of Jesus here and now?

On Wednesday morning of this week, I was briefly sitting in the St. John's parking lot in my car listening to National Public Radio about how devastating Covid 19 is in the country of India right now. People are desperately driving their loved ones from hospital to hospital with nowhere to go because there isn't any room and there's also no oxygen for people. While listening to that, I happen to glance up at the little warning message on my side view convex mirror, you know the one that says:

Objects in mirror are closer than they appear.

And, I found myself finding that warning label and often whimsical meme to be about right for how things seem today. Used as an analogy for life, doesn't that sound accurate? It seems like things change so fast today that

they keep coming and they are definitely closer than they appear!

I thought that's a great analogy for how much worry and anxiety we live with today. The world's problems are enormous. We don't have control over those problems. How much control can we actually have anyway? Really, can't we just live in our little space and not be so concerned about the world's problems?

Looking at the side mirrors of our lives, we may wonder, the creditors may be closer than they appear, the people we don't like may be closer than they appear, that deadline may be closer than it appears, COVID may be closer than it appears. Worry is a useful tool to try to control what is not controllable.

We do all we can to keep the worry machine going, keeping things in control as much as possible for our lives. I have all I can contain right here we might feel! Surely, I can't be expected to also help others? And, yet, keeping to oneself and only oneself and our loved ones – that's not what Jesus would have us be as faithful followers of him.

There was a story of a man from Australia who in 1939 heard

in the news daily the likelihood that a war was coming. So, he did the one thing he thought he could do to control his situation in life and that was to do his best to predict where in the South Pacific would be the safest place to be in the event of that war so he could avoid it and live as safely as possible. He picked up his family, sold his house and property, and moved to Guadalcanal, the place thought of at that time to be the least likely to have any danger. It turned out to be the place where the most horrible battle occurred in the South Pacific during WWII.

I think many of us if not most of us have a good "worry" meter in us. After all, we do need to have anxiety about some things, or else we would find motivation to be difficult. But, it seems to me that in our world, and due to some real cultural, political, and psychological dangers, our worry is concerning. Worry cannot only get toxic for our health, but it is interest we pay on trouble before it even appears.

Now, I want to admit here that I am a classic worrier. And, I worry about little things, so please don't assume that I have it all together. I worry about my Mother, about our church, about getting everything done in a day,

about my husband's workload, and about my health, about what will happen a year from now. I worry just like anyone else and I envy those of you here who tend to not worry about much.

But, I also know that many of you share the same kind of worries as I at present. Worriers like I can be sometimes know down deep that what they worry about generally doesn't happen. Worriers also know that they can't do anything about what worries them. The problem with worry is that sometimes we don't discern what is trite to worry about, and what is important to worry about. And the circular, natural neurological tendency to swirl it around in our heads is evolutionary!

But also, and this is the hard part for me to say being a worrier, worrying is ultimately atheistic. When we spend our time worrying about everything, we may actually be communicating to ourselves in our brain language that we don't believe God is truly near us. We do not trust God when we worry. And, when we worry, we doubt God's ability, God's providence, and most importantly, God's presence in our lives. Suddenly, we may think that God is not capable of

knowing about us and being concerned about us.

Now, if I were to say to you right now, "Don't worry," it wouldn't be very helpful. If I told you to not think of elephants, you no doubt would have elephants in your mind. But, the antidote I do have for you and I do use as a mantra for my life is to look again in that side view mirror of life. What if instead of saying:

Objects in mirror are closer than they appear

We think and say: ***The Good Shepherd is closer than he appears. Christ is closer than he appears. God is closer than God appears.***

For, Jesus said that as the Good Shepherd, he takes care of the sheep from the wolves that come to scatter his flock. Jesus does not abandon us and promises to never do so. I say this directly to these five celebrating the tangible sign of presence for you at Holy Communion – Jesus will not abandon you. He has promised to be with you always. And, in that small physical sign of Jesus in your hand today, that is a real promise.

You may not understand what God is doing in your life. You may feel like you are looking into a fog and not knowing where God is for you, but God is there and God is closer than God may appear to us. Underneath all that worry, and with all the world's problems, for indeed there are many, the Good Shepherd has said that he knows you. He knows his flock.

Those who have been in my Centering Prayer class would be familiar with mantra prayers, prayers that you say over and over again. What if when you begin to worry, you say this prayer or mantra over and over to help you: Christ is closer than he appears.

For all of us worry. Some more than others. And, in this world today, it seems as if objects, and problems, and pressures are closer than they may appear flying fast, hard to respond to. But, the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, knows his sheep. He knows their voice and he will never leave them even when the hired hand may do so.

There is a verse in the song we will hear today as a paraphrase of the 23rd psalm. Think of them as a reminder that Christ is closer to you than he appears:

“Surely your kindness and mercy follow me all the days of my life; I will dwell in the house of my God forevermore. Shepherd me, O God, beyond my wants, beyond my fears, from death into life.”

Amen.