

Dunbarton Congregational Church
Sunday, August 12, 2007
9:30 a.m.

“Home of the Brave”

In more than half a century of living, there is one incontrovertible truth I have learned: life is dangerous, downright fatal even. Disaster veritably lurks around every corner! First, there's childhood with its requisite bumps, bruises, broken limbs, stitches, and other catastrophes involving heights, depths and everything in between. My friend Donna flew off the neighborhood rope swing and was hospitalized for a week. Stevie Dooley fell out of a tree house and walks with a limp to this day. I skated headfirst into a cement drain pipe and you can be the judge of whether the damage was permanent. And don't forget the psychological traumas: parents who yelled at us, parents who ignored us, parents who ignored one another, parents who had no business being parents.

Our teen years hold the promise of rejection, humiliation, underachievement, self image issues, eating disorders, drug and alcohol problems, car accidents and sexual misadventures. After surviving all that, we arrive at young adulthood, that tortuous period when we worry if we will ever be able to afford to leave our parents' home, or find the “*right*” person, the *right* job, the *right* life. Finally, we experience the terror of full-fledged adulthood, that time in life when we agonize over all of those hazards in store for our children, teens, parents, friends, the world, *ourselves*.

I heard an author on NPR last week who keeps a two hundred pound rubber-band ball in his living room; it's his life work, started when he was ten. Being an adult in America today feels like sitting on the couch in Zach Hample's living room, silently waiting for one of those elastics to snap. One little ping, and who knows, everything we've spent our lives working for could unravel in a million pieces! Life is to be feared.

Terrorists, unscrupulous mortgage lenders, sexual predators, bottom-line driven employers, cancer cells, drunk drivers, saturated fats, global warming, Iran, the religious right, the religious left, organized religion, death, taxes—I am telling you, it takes a brave heart just to get out of bed in the morning!

Then along comes Jesus saying, “Don’t worry about anything because God is your shepherd and he will provide. He will look after you, rescue you, feed you, protect you. “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the very Kingdom itself! Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Cast your worries aside and embrace the word of Christ and all will be well!” What is our response in the face of all this glorious good news~“Yeah right! What planet do *you* live on?”

How frustrated Jesus must feel, don’t you think? For two thousand years this “don’t worry” business has been an impossible sell for God. What do you suppose Jesus is thinking as he makes his way to Jerusalem? Time is running out. He’s got to help his followers understand . . .

Take out cell phone and dial~ring, ring, ring.

Hi Gabriel, it’s me, Jesus, is my dad around? Yes, I’ll hold . . . (Hold up finger for congregation to wait a minute)

Hi dad, it’s me. Yes, I’m okay.

Ah, Martha and Mary are fine as far as I know.

Yes, dad, the Lord’s Prayer was a big hit.

Yes, I’ve been trying to tell the disciples who I really am.

I *know* time is running out.

Yes, dad, the people like the parables already!

Listen, there’s something I need to talk to you about, that business in the Garden of Eden. I think you were a little harsh.

No, hear me out! You cursed Adam and Eve with the knowledge of good and evil. Now that’s all people think about! Do you know what it’s like waking up every morning knowing that you’re going to die someday, that the people you love most can be taken from you, that all kinds of terrible things can happen to you? It takes courage to live with this, trust me!

You see dad, you woke Adam and Eve up; you gave them the ability to imagine the worst and now they just worry all the time! Now I’m supposed to fix things~to make amends, to tell them everything will be fine. They aren’t buying it.

No, forget the birds of the air. Of course ravens aren’t concerned about anything! Of course the lilies of the field are carefree! What do they know? Can they imagine their own demise? Wouldn’t it have been better to just stop Creation with the fish?

Yes, (sigh) I told them to sell all their possessions and give to the poor. It's not going to happen, dad . . . Am I going to die for nothing? I'm frightened. Please help me.

(Don't close phone!)

How will God respond? What can Jesus say that will convince us that worry will not add one hour to our lives?

I used to be a first class worrier. One of my favorite books was *The Worst Case Scenario Book* in which readers learn to survive shark attacks, falling elevators, and life on a desert island. Now I have new passion: the Discovery Channel show, *Man vs. Wild*, in which former British special forces officer Bear Grylls demonstrates wilderness skills as he races through the world's harshest environments and back to civilization. Thanks to Bear, I now know how to eat a live fish, survive a dunk in a frozen lake, and yes, skin a deer for warmth in the Scottish Highlands. You see, I'm not taking this perilous thing called life lying down. I am *prepared*.

And we the American people are *prepared*. We've bunkered ourselves with new homeland security initiatives, an ongoing war in Iraq, bigger bank accounts, sex-offender watch groups, family-busting, back-breaking, layoff-proof work schedules, anti-oxidants, monounsaturated fats, kiddie bracelets, alarms, protective devices and monitoring systems of every variety. Did you see the article this week about summer camps that use surveillance cameras to reassure anxious parents that their children are safe? Good grief!

But then, remember, life is "dangerous," fatal even—and Jesus continues to walk to the cross for nothing as long as we think that our personal safety rests exclusively in our own hands. My friends, it's good to be prepared in life. It's good to take precautions. But the greatest precaution of all is to be prepared for Christ, for his Word to shoot right through our hearts and bind us together as one flock at last, to follow this shepherd of ours, feeding the poor and rescuing the lost and loving the world, not living in fear of it.

Ring, ring.

Hello?

Oh, hi, dad. No, no, don't worry, I won't give up. I'll never give up. I love them, too. Good night.