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“Simplicity”

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Matthew 6:25-34

A little boy was overheard asking his father, “What do you call that holiday that comes after Halloween, when everybody gets a turkey?”

His dad replied, “That would be called Election Day.”

It will be so good to get this coming Election Day behind us, so that we can get on with the business of our lives.

According to Catholic theologian Thomas Aquinas, the very nature of God is characterized by infinite simplicity.

Often we imagine God to be just the opposite, complicated and incomprehensible and far beyond the limited understanding of the average person.

According to Aquinas and many others, the essence of God is really pure and simple, and it the same divine essence that is within all of us who were created in God’s image.

Now simplicity is not to be confused with simple mindedness, but it is rather a state of being that is pure, clear, and uncomplicated.

For many years now I have longed for those qualities in my life.

I have suspected that if my life were less complicated I would be more at peace and have more time for those things that nourish my soul.

My life has gotten increasingly complicated over the years, and I am not sure why.

I seem to have much more to do, and less time to do it in.

When I am honest with myself, I can admit that a part of the complexity of my life comes not from people or relationships, **but from things—from stuff.** Homes and clothes and cars and electronics all need time, energy and attention.

Stuff makes demands of you; soon your possessions begin to possess you.

Someone described this sort of insanity by saying:

“We think we can find happiness by constantly buying things we do not need, in order to impress people we do not like.”

Within just four years I have had the job of cleaning out the homes of two loved ones. My mother died in 2004 and my little sister died two weeks ago.

And being the oldest and most responsible member of my family, I get to go through all their stuff.

It’s really, really hard, as many of you know, it is a very emotional experience.

But both times I have been astonished by all of the stuff one person can accumulate in a lifetime, even a short lifetime.

My mom collected giraffes, we were a tall family, and she had tons of them. My sister collected elephants, and I do not know why, but she had beautiful, intricate, exotic elephants. It is so hard to box things up for the Action Center, knowing how special these things were to the people I loved.

I know that I do not have a place for all of this stuff; I do not want or need it, but it's so very hard to let it go.

Now I do not collect anything in particular, like giraffes and elephants, and I am really not a possessive person. But I am guilty: I actually have shoes that I have never worn, lots of books I have never read. I have dishes I have never used. I have about 10 boxes of Christmas decorations, and I know that when Christmas items go on sale after Christmas, I will probably get some more. It's insanity.

I have always suspected that if I had **less stuff** I would be more at peace.

And it is not just the things we **have** that adds complexity to our lives, but the things we **do**, as well. We pack in just as much as we possibly can into every hour of every day, including Sunday. And we cannot do just one thing at a time, we have to talk on the phone while we drive, we have to read the paper while we eat. I heard a story on NPR recently about multi-tasking and how that has become the norm and attention spans have drastically diminished as a result.

But it really is backfiring, because when you do several things at once you do not do anything very well and miss out on a sense of satisfaction for a job well done.

They interviewed some adolescents who said they were bored by doing just one thing, that is why they have 3 or 4 computer screens up at a time, and why they must text message or listen to I-Pods while doing homework.

One thing at a time is just boring. We need many sources of stimulation, which means that our lives are a far cry from being simple, pure, clear, uncomplicated.

Scott Savage believed that the only way to get some peace and simplicity from the insanity of his complicated world was to completely unhook from all of it.

So he walked 120 miles to the Ohio Department of Motor Vehicles and tried to have his driver's license revoked.

They had no idea what to do with him.

He recalls that moment in his book *A Plain Life*, the story of one man's journey toward a radically simple existence. Scott & Maryann Savage were urban professionals with long commutes to jobs they hated when they decided life was passing them by.

They began reading about the Amish and the Wilburites, an old conservative faction of the Quakers.

They were so impressed that they decided to go completely off the grid.
The Savages now live with their 4 children on a 3 acre homestead in Ohio.

They have no electricity, which means no TV, no computer.

They have a huge garden, a Plowhorse named Ned.

They make their own clothes and home school their kids.

Savage says that he had to pull his family completely out of this system, so that:

“...their dreams could not be sold back to them.”

He said that is exactly what American consumer culture does,
takes your dreams and sells them back to you.

Now what the Savages have done is very extreme, of course.

Try telling your teenagers you are cutting off the electricity. Before we had high speed internet our kids felt like they were living in a cave in Afghanistan. But this increasingly popular movement toward voluntary simplicity reveals our deep hunger for a simpler life of clarity and purity.

It reveals a deep hunger for God, whose nature is simplicity.

Jesus addressed this very thing in the Sermon on the Mount when he spoke to those who were slaves to their stuff and stressed by their lifestyles.

One version of this text has Jesus using the word “anxious” 6 times.

He told the people of his day to stop fussing about meals, clothes, money, things.

Were he speaking to us today, he might say,

“Do not be trapped by your lifestyle and anxious about the economy, the stock market, your retirement fund, or politics.

Do not be anxious about your job, your loved ones, and your future.

Focus upon God and allow God to work in your life, and then things will take care of themselves.”

It is really very simple.

When we focus upon God first, the God who is always with us and within us, we realize that what we have and who we are is enough.

We realize that God has given us this day, this body, this life, this relationship, this church, and it is good. It is enough.

We do not need more and more and more to be happy.

And we do not need to miss the present by borrowing trouble from the future.

These words of Jesus really are a prescription for self-care, a guide for helping us have compassion toward ourselves.

Only when we have genuine compassion and generosity toward ourselves do we

develop compassion and generosity for others.

So give yourself a gift today, the gift of taking these words to heart:

“Do not be anxious or worried about anything at all. God knows what you need.”

This very simple message is what our church is trying to offer all the time.

We want people to understand that even though life is hard and sad and difficult,

God is always good and God is always there for us.

Possessions will never bring contentment, investments will vanish, and people will die, disappoint you and break your heart.

But God and God’s love will always be there for us.

It is a message that people are not hearing anywhere else.

And that is why the ministry of this church matters so much, not only to us, but to so many people out there, and those who will come after us.

It is really quite simple. When we stay focused on God in Jesus Christ,
we can choose detachment and peace,

We can choose generosity and service to others.

And there find a simplicity that is pure, clear and uncomplicated...

Let’s watch.... ([Video Here](#))

Let us pray...