

Crystal Ball

19 February 2006

(also 12 Feb in Florida)

Bible passage: **Matthew 6:34** (*The Message*)

“Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don’t get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.”

Sermon nugget: Many of us waste a lot of time worrying about what may or may not happen in the future. What’s another way to consider the future?

When this Sunday was entitled “Crystal Ball,” I got this image in my mind of a gypsy-type person, dressed in colorful garb, with a turban on her head, doing some abra-ca-dabra kind of chant while gazing into a crystal ball. Maybe I’ve seen too many of those Johnny Carson routines when the Great Karnac tried to discern the correct question for the answer..

When we think of a crystal ball, we often think of that staring into it could reveal our future. In fact, we often do many things to try to figure out just what tomorrow might hold for us. I recall years ago now, when a study group I was a part of went to see a numerologist. I thought this was going to be the same sort of voodoo, but it was a pretty amazing experience just how accurately the guy was able to describe us. When that happened, I think many folks began to believe that what he foresaw for the future was just as accurate.

For my money, that seemed a lot like reading our horoscope. I have to admit that I often glance at mine in the paper, but once I’ve looked at it, I realize how generic it really is. What is being written could be said about everyone of us at one time or another. Needless to say, I guess I’m a bit skeptical when it comes to some of the gimmicks that claim to be able to predict what lies ahead.

Just for fun, I got on the Internet and found a website that declared that it could see into the future. The reader was encouraged to ask a question that would only require a yes or no answer, so I did. I asked something about the future direction of The Garden. Do you know what answer I got? The response was, “I can’t believe you asked me that!” So much for predicting the future.

Trying to forecast the future is a rather fascinating study. Early on in the history of The Garden, one of our Gardeners arranged for our Leadership Team to meet for an afternoon with someone who called himself a “futurist.” It was a very interesting time, and I have to admit that I found it quite intriguing.

I also have to tell you that I really like to read things, like some of Faith Popcorn’s predictions. Sometimes those who analyze trends turn out to be rather accurate. We can look at

almost any field of study and find someone who’s predicting what tomorrow will hold. That can be in the stock market, restaurant trends, financial forecasting; it can be in almost any category we want.

I guess part of my interest in such things is because, on the Gallup strengths-finder tool, one of my top five strengths is called “futuristic.” I’ll try to describe briefly what the book *Now, Discover Your Strengths* by Marcus Buckingham and Donald Clifton has to say about those of us who are “futuristic.”

It begins with the words, “You are the kind of person who loves to peer over the horizon. The future fascinates you.” Then it goes on to say that futuristic people tend to see a picture in a great deal of detail, and they are energized by thinking about the future. Those who tend to be more practical often frustrate the futuristic folks. There—now you have a little key to what makes crazy Linda tick.

I suspect there are others of you who are interested in the future and what it holds. I have a friend who has expressed a wish to be able to see just a few minutes into the future. He thinks it would be a good way for us to direct our lives more clearly. Probably he’s right, but I don’t think that’s going to happen.

There are many folks who *worry* about the future. My Mom was someone like that. It seemed to me that she was worried all the time about something that *might* happen, and she always expected it to be awful. I wonder if she lost some of her enjoyment of life because she was so worried about the future, about things over which she really had little or no control.

I know some of us here are worried about the future. With pension plans going down the tubes for many of us, and inflation and health costs on the rise, some of us may wonder if we’ll have enough to make it to retirement. How will we live? Will we remain healthy, or will we be able to afford the care we need when our bodies break down on us?

Certainly, September 11 contributed to the fear that some have about the future. I’m sure that the majority of us are more concerned today about our personal and national security than we were on September 10, 2001. To realize that we’re so vulnerable and that there are some things we cannot prevent can leave us with a very uneasy feeling.

That’s the kind of situation our Bible passage is addressing today. This is in a segment of the gospel of Matthew that contains a number of the teachings of Jesus. In this particular passage, Jesus is addressing the concern that so many of his day had about having enough to eat or drink and clothes to wear.

To this worry, Jesus says: “Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don’t get worked up about what

may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes."

Jesus said what he said because he understood something that many of us don't, and that's that worry is a useless activity. Most of the time, the things we worry about never come into being, and things we could never have predicted or dreamed of occur. There's no way we are accurate in our worrying. Almost always, the things we worry about are never quite as traumatic and serious as we imagine them to be.

I read somewhere that 40% of the things we worry about never happen. Thirty percent are in the past and can't be helped; 12 % concern the affairs of others and really aren't our business. Ten percent of our worries are about sickness, either real or imagined, and only 8% are really worth worrying about. However, even that 8% isn't worth all the time and energy we spend on them.

A *United Church Observer* writer did a good job of summarizing where Jesus was talking about with these words: "Worry is like a rocking chair. It will give you something to do, but it won't get you anywhere." Worry is not only useless, but it can paralyze us to the point that we don't move at all. When that happens, we fail to live the life God has in mind for us.

The answer to dealing with our concerns about the future, according to Jesus, is quite simple: Trust God. Jesus said, "Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow." Regardless of the things that happen in our lives, we need to realize that we're only see a small part of the picture. There's a much larger perspective that we can't see, and probably can't understand, at least at the present time. We can't know how the things that happen to us fit into the entire scenario of our lives.

That's why the perfect antidote to our worry and fear is faith. We trust, without clear evidence to support it, that God is up to whatever challenges we face, and that God will help us deal with the "hard things" that may come our way. God is always God, and God's presence, courage and strength are always with us.

Let me explain what I think faith is like. Mike and I recently visited Jamestown, Virginia. That's the site of the first permanent settlement in the New World. The founders of Jamestown arrived at Cape Henry, Virginia at 4 o'clock in the morning, and the first things the exhausted travelers did was to raise a large wooden cross and thank God for their safe arrival.

When we were in Jamestown, we had the opportunity to tour authentic reproductions of two of the three ships that made the crossing. The smallest was called the *Discovery*, and it only measured 50' 2 ½ inches from bow to stern. It did not

have full headroom and the area below deck was partitioned for only four bunks. The *Discovery* had carried twelve passengers and a crew of nine.

Another tourist made a comment that has stayed with me. He said, "You certainly would have to believe in something to come across in this thing!" That was certainly a true statement, and it's clear from those early settlers' actions that their faith was in God.

How do we describe what that kind of faith is like? It's an experience, and words seem hardly adequate to express it, but some have tried. For instance, Carter Heyward has written, "Faith is a process of leaping into the abyss not on the basis of any certainty about where we shall land, but rather on the belief that we *shall* land."

Richard Rohr has described what he believes faith is all about. He said, "Imagine walking into a darkened room. We put our hands in front of us, afraid we are going to bump into a piece of furniture or slip on a rug. We walk very slowly. This is very much what God calls us to on the journey of faith."

That's what faith is all about, and I believe that God's hope for us—that each one of us will have the courage and trust to walk into that darkened room, not knowing for sure what's there, but trusting we can make it through the dark. And we can make it, because we are not alone; God is always with us—to catch us when we fall, to lift us up when we're down, to challenge us when we're too content, to love us when we feel unlovable, to buoy us up when we're sinking. That's what faith is—trusting that God will be there, no matter what.

CLOSING:

As we leave here this morning, I hope that we will take the words of our Bible passage to heart. Jesus said, "Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes."

I pray that those are more than just words, but great assurance that we can count on God.

Have a good Sunday and go in peace. Amen.