

Pastor Gregory P. Fryer
Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY
5/4/2008, Easter 7A
1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11, John 17:1-11

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

⁷Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you.(1 Peter 5:7, RSV)

This verse from First Peter Chapter Five speaks of a wonderful reciprocity according to which *our* cares are matched by the caring of *the Lord*. This reciprocity is even easier to see in the *King James Version*, which uses the same word both times:

Casting all your *care* upon him; for he *careth* for you.(1 Peter 5:7, KJV)

Amazing thought! We know something of cares and anxieties in this life, for along with all of humanity we know of disappointments and worries. But our text invites us to imagine that God, the Maker of heaven and earth, frets too. Only, he worries not for himself, but for you. You are the occasion for his contemplations and worries. You are the one who keeps the Lord awake at night. “How is Mary Ellen doing? What must I do that things will work out well for her?” Place your own name in the divine question: “How is Gregory doing? What must I do that all things will work together for his good?” And if all the world should fade away and there should be only you and your troubles, cast your care upon him, for he careth for you!

Suppose I come to you and say, “Good news! I know someone who cares for you!” You might answer, “That would be awfully nice. I could sure use someone at this time in life to care for me. Is it my mother?” And I would answer, “Yes, I bet she does care for you. But I am thinking of someone else.” “Is it my neighbor in the apartment next door?” “Well, I hope your neighbor does indeed care for you. But I am thinking of someone else.” “Tell me who, friend, because it would cheer me up to know that someone in this world cares for me.” “Then listen to my answer. I mean the Lord, Maker of heaven and earth. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: they care for you with all their hearts. And their care is active and strong. It is no mere sentiment, but salvation itself! And so, your life is going to turn out okay. Do not worry overmuch. Instead, treasure these days and put them to the very best use you can.”

In this morning’s Gospel Lesson, Jesus leaves off speaking to his disciples and turns to prayer. But in turning to prayer, he is still preoccupied with his disciples. He prays not for himself, but for them.

¹¹And now I am no more in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to thee. Holy Father, keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.(John 17:11, RSV)

What kind of world is it that Jesus is leaving the disciples? What kind of a world is it that Jesus feels urgent need to pray for his disciples? Well, to use the stark language of our Epistle Lesson, it is a world with an opponent:

⁸Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring

lion, seeking some one to devour.(1 Peter 5:8, RSV)

That is, we live in a world that is not as our Maker intended, nor as it shall be when God's kingdom comes. Meanwhile, we live in a world with its fair share of heartaches, setbacks, temptations, and failures. So, cast your cares upon the Lord.

What a great, active word that is: *cast* your cares. Think of a fisherman casting the lure. I've done and you've probably done that too: I've hauled back and flung my pole forward, casting that lure out into the lake as far as I could get it. What a beautiful arc it would make, zooming through the summer sky, heading toward far yonder water.

So let it be with your cares. Do not hug them to yourself. Do not weigh yourself down with the discouraging thought that you have no chance to lay down your cares, no one to share them with. No, cast those cares onto the Lord. Through prayer and increase of your Christian piety, send those cares zooming out through the sky, heading toward heaven.

Now, let us go through various aspects of life, reflecting that our God cares for us in those parts of life, and in reflecting be encouraged. I am thinking of the worlds of vocation, romance, and parenting.

Would it not be interesting if the apostle's financial advice were a law woven into the economies of the world:

Owe no man any thing, but to love one another... (Romans 13:8, KJV)

Alas, it is not so. I bet it is rational and potentially benevolent that there should be lending and borrowing, credit, risk, profit, loss, and so forth. But this means that there are bosses tossing and turning in the night time, wondering once again whether they borrowed money at the right terms, whether they have the right levels of inventory, whether they hired enough employees, whether they hired too many, whether they are compensating their people right, insuring them right, providing pension right.

There are engineers wondering, Having I designed this bridge right? Did I miss something?

There are scientists and researchers wondering, Having I thought of everything? Have I anticipated everything? What have I doing? What am I unleashing?

There are police captains, FBI agents, military colonels wondering, Have I mounted sufficient force? Am I going to lose my people? How many? What am I going to say to their families?

There are therapists, pastors, and friends wondering, Am I up to this task? Am I in over my head?

There are workers wondering whether they still have enough strength for their jobs: farmers and fisherman and fisherwomen, coalminers, ironworkers, loggers, cowboys, nursing aids, home health workers: Am I getting too old for this work? I still need the money, but I am still strong enough?

Such questions are natural and appropriate, but the answer to them is pretty straightforward: Do what you can, and then cast your cares upon the Lord:

I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.(John 9:4, KJV)

And then, be not anxious:

²⁵Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? ²⁶Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? ²⁷Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? ²⁸And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: ²⁹And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.(Matthew 6:25-29, KJV)

Be not anxious, I say to you and to me, but cast your cares upon the Lord, for he cares for you.

Next, the world of romance. Ahh, here there is much joy, much sorrow. And when we feel abandoned in the world of romance, we tend to take it very much to heart and to feel awfully lonesome.

But never imagine that you really *are* left alone, with none to care for you:

¹⁵ Can a woman forget her sucking child, [saith the Lord] that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. ¹⁶Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me.(Isa 49:15-16, KJV)

It is fun to imagine the day-to-day life of the great romances of the Bible – Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Jacob and Rachel, Ruth and Boaz, Mary and Joseph...it is fun to imagine the details of these romances, but the Bible does not really tell us much about them.

On the other hand, the Bible does speak of romantic love, and speaks of it with approval. Especially I am speaking of the Old Testament book called “The Song of Songs.” Parents, if you should like your children to read a fine example of love poetry, then let them read the Song of Songs (only let them grow up a bit first.) And in the New Testament, we find St. Paul speaking tenderly of married love:

³¹For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. ³²This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. ³³Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.(Ephesians 5:31-35, KJV)

And, I might well add, it is in full accord with the flow of this passage that St. Paul also means this: Husband, reverence your wife. Reverence her, and never let her down, for Christ never did such a thing to the Church.

And why does the Bible speak of romantic love? Answer: because the Bible is convinced that the Lord loves you with such tender, joyful love.

Therefore, when the apostle invites us to cast our cares upon the Lord for he cares for us, do not think that the caring of the Lord is the calm, dispassionate kind – as if were sympathy exercised as a theory or a discipline. No! Think of God’s care of you to be

along the lines of a loving spouse who is head-over-heels in love for you. Cast your cares on Him, for he cares for you, deeply!

My last aspect of life in which it is good to remember that the Lord cares for us is parenting. The Bible says this:

Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it. (Proverbs 22:6, KJV)

And many a parent sighs and wonders, When will old age ever come, that my little one will return to the Lord?

If you are feeling a bit down-hearted about the raising of your children, then cast your cares upon the Lord, for he cares for you – all you parents who are in need of some care.

And take pleasure in this thought too: When our text invites us to cast our cares upon the Lord because he cares for us, his care is strong and steady and goes on shining upon us and upon our children even when we are unworthy. You parents love your children that way. Your college student, for example, might have gotten into some kind of trouble or might be getting bad grades, yet you phone that student anyway and call him “honey,” call her “darling,” and you still bake chocolate chip cookies and mail the care package off to your child because, why? well, because it is as the word for the package says: you care. So it is with the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth: He cares for you with a love that is steady and true, even if we should be in a hard stretch of life.

Recently one of our elderly church members told me that she loves it when I speak of the promises of the Lord. Well, there are many beautiful promises of the Lord connected with this morning’s promise that the Lord cares for us. I close with but two of them — one from the Old Testament and one from the New:

²When thou passest through the waters [says the Lord], I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. ³For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour... (Isaiah 43:2-3, KJV)

And [Jesus our Saviour says] I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. (John 10:28, KJV)

Cast, then, your life, your faith, and your cares upon that One who cares for you, even to the degree of dying for you, even Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.