

St. Thomas's Episcopal Church
Newark, DE
Twenty Sixth Sunday after Pentecost & Episcopal Campus Ministry Sunday
November 13, 2016/Year C
Malachi 4:1-2a; Psalm 98; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13; Luke 21:5-19
Colleen Murray

+++++

May my words reveal the greater glory of God. AMEN

+++++

Good morning. As some of you may know, my name is Colleen Murray. I am currently a member of Episcopal Campus Ministry. For those of you who don't know me, family is something that has always been important to me. I grew up with my mother, father, and sister. On my father's side, I have that typical huge Irish family that enjoys each other's company at the holidays and family events. Every summer we have this tradition that our family calls Murray Weekend. We go to the beach and spend 3 days with people that we might not see often. Over the years, we keep getting new additions which makes this "holiday" even more fun.

Over many years of coming to church with my mom and sister, I have experienced the same type of relationship with my church family. My St. Thomas' story starts before I was even born. My mother started attending the church before I was born. Once I was born, and likewise with my sister, we started attending church with her. Eventually, we were baptized here and started the Sunday School program as toddlers.

Some of my favorite memories from church are sitting in the very back during the 8 o'clock service with Ms. Vicki and Mrs. Holyoke after communion. Mom would always bring us Cheerios and we would get to color hoping that we would stay quiet during the service. Over the years, I got to know the parishioners. Many of them still attend the church to this day. I have had the privilege of getting to know these people and sharing my life with them.

My faith journey brought me to confirmation with Mr. Rys and then to college. I stayed active in the church during high school, but normally with the 8 o'clock service. After starting at the University of Delaware, I learned more about this group called ECM.

What's going on in your world today? Everyone has something that they are worried about. If it's easiest, we can take a peek into a typical college student's life, but I mean that's where I'm at in my life right now. A typical week involves worrying about lots of different things. Normally I start with the most basic things; will I be able to finish this homework in time? What time should I eat at? Will I pass this class? Will I get into the classes I need? Some of the questions are even more universal. What do my friends think of me? Am I healthy enough? How is my family?

Growing up, I was someone who always worried. I still am. Some people like to call it anxiety. All I know is that I worried about failing out of college because I got my first C in a physics class. I feel that panic grip my chest about the smallest things. I look down at my To Do list and see a mile long list of things that can't get done. The fear overtakes me and my head starts spinning into a whirlwind of

negative thoughts. If I don't complete this To Do list, then I won't get my homework done. And as we all know, if I miss one homework assignment, that means that I will fail this class. If I fail this class, then my GPA is destroyed. If my GPA goes downhill, I won't graduate. Somehow, I this one To Do list becomes the basis for my future; that the worst possible things will happen if it's not done well.

But this happens to everyone to some degree. We are all worrying about something. I know most of you aren't worrying about your next exam, but we want to make sure that those we love are okay. But there comes a point in time when you have to step back and analyze where you're at in your life. Sure, if I don't get my to do list done, I won't be in as good of a spot, but that doesn't mean I will fail college. Besides, I have so much going for me. My family is healthy and happy. In the grand scheme of things, my life is good so even if one aspect isn't going great I don't have to worry about it being the end of the world. In the moment, it can be hard to keep everything in perspective. That assignment might feel like it is everything to me at that moment, but it really isn't.

Anxiety and worry are something that we deal with our entire life, so it becomes a matter of learning to manage it. For me, my first line of defense is my family. They have seen me in my best states, and in my worst. I can't count the number of times that my parents have sat up with me in high school talking me through the worry over an exam or a paper. They still do this in college, except by phone. There are so many other people who support me whether they realize it or not. I have made really good friends in college and they have been such a strong support system for me. Even if they don't know what is going on, they find a way to distract me from my stress. Like most people, my relationship with God has been a rocky one, but just coming to church on a regular basis, especially this year, has allowed me to know that there is always going to be a place to land even when the rest of my world may feel like it is falling apart.

Being a member of ECM, I was able to go on the mission trip to Costa Rica this past spring. When I was there, I received some bad news. I was on Facebook one afternoon alone in the girls' room when I read that one of my former volleyball coaches had died unexpectedly. It was one of those moments when everything froze. Last time I had seen Coach Ron, he was doing incredibly well. He was about my parent's age, and people that age, just don't die. I reached out to my parents and they confirmed the news, but told me that they weren't planning on telling me until I had come home. During this time, one of the other girls in ECM came into the room and saw that I was upset. She sat with me and we just talked for a while. Likewise, later that night, another one of my friends saw I wasn't feeling well and sat up with me until I felt better. Neither of them asked for details, but they just were with me and let me talk when I felt ready to open up.

Everyone should have that friend who will hold them when things go wrong. But we will always have God too even if we may blame him for putting us in that particular spot at that moment. It can be hard to see at times, but sometimes He is there in the little things, like letting a friend walk in at the right moment or even canceling class on a crazy day.

Despite the sad news I received in Costa Rica, the trip was an incredible experience. It was eye opening because I realized, I don't have much to worry about. I know that there will always be food available for me and a roof over my head. While spending time in Costa Rica, we had the opportunity to help in the schools and spend time with the children. These children had a much harder life than I did, but they were always so happy. We learned that a lot of the families were immigrants that lived in shacks for homes. Many of the children received all their meals at school because food at home wasn't a guarantee. They didn't complain about not having the best toys or the newest clothes. It made me appreciate what I have so much more.

After returning from Costa Rica, I became more invested in the food pantry, Blue Hen Bounty, that ECM had started to help food insecure students on campus. I was helping with it regularly, but at the start of this year, I became even more active. I attended a meeting with Deacon and administrators from the University so that we could gain their support and spread awareness of its' existence to those who need truly need it. It was a successful meeting and I hope to see it flourish. During that one meeting with the administrators, I realized how naïve I was. I have my parents support in paying for my college education, yet I know there are many at the University who are not as fortunate. During this meeting, I heard stories of students who lost their loans or housing arrangements, and were having trouble supporting themselves. There are students who sacrifice their food budget in order to buy textbooks or materials for classes. Why should someone be asked to make that decision? There are other students that are non-traditional, and may be returning to college after military service or had to work and start a family prior to finishing college, and still others who are paying for college out of their own pockets. I know people who have had to pay for college on their own, but I never considered how much of a strain and a worry that must put on the individual on a daily basis. Can you imagine worrying not only about your grades and success in college, but also about where your next meal might come from? I hope to see Blue Hen Bounty reach as many students as possible, to make life just a little bit easier for them. Everyone already has enough to worry about and it is something little that we can give to help others in our community.

Every week, there are many things to worry about, like struggles in school, work, or family. Some of these are things that you can't control, so you need to learn to accept them and do your best to make the most with what you can. There are so many great things in the world that you shouldn't let one worry get you down.

When I was in high school we used to say a prayer every time before a big test or exam. It is all about accepting what is unchangeable and doing your best to make the most with what you can. Some of you might recognize the prayer as the Serenity Prayer. I still say it before exams or when I'm particularly worried about something, so I figured I would end with it:

“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change

The courage to change the things that I can,

And the wisdom to know the difference.”