

**Choral Evensong, St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Feast of St. Catherine of Siena, Fourth Week of Easter, Thursday, April 29, 2021
Ps. 119:73-80, 1 John 1:5-2:2, Luke 12:22-24, 29-31**

"Jesus said to his disciples, 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about what you will eat or what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.'" – Luke 12:22-24, 29-31 (paraphrased)

"Don't worry." It's easier said than done, isn't it?
Surely there's no shortage of things in our lives and in our hurting world to worry about, things which demand a lot of our energy and attention. Things like our health, money, jobs. Things like injustice. Racism. Violence. Inequality.
Many of us feel called to a life of faith, but faith can be challenging and elusive when dangers and uncertainties surround us. Many of us feel called to tend to the broken parts of our world, but how do we face the troubles of our time and not worry that our children will encounter shooters at school, or that our water and air will be poisoned and unusable for future generations? How can we walk in the light when darkness seems to be lurking everywhere?

St. Catherine of Siena, whose feast we mark this evening, was a Dominican and medieval mystic who became an agent of change for the world around her, and her influence on the Church endured long after her death. St. Catherine spent her short life speaking truth to power, insisting on reform and preaching peace in the midst of conflict. She is credited with single-handedly convincing the Pope to restore the papacy to Rome after decades of French political domination in Avignon. Yet St. Catherine was not a social climber or a plotting politician. She led a humble life of contemplative prayer, punctuated by visions and ecstatic mystical experiences, including receiving stigmata. This life of prayer and contemplation provided her with everything she needed, to act on behalf of those who had no voice, to have the Pope's ear, and to set sea changes in motion.

St. Catherine had everything she needed, and so do we. Do not worry, says Jesus. Look at the life of nature around you. Nature has everything it needs to thrive. The flowers and the birds are provided for, without earning it or working for it.

Some of us might be outside tending our gardens in the coming weeks. When we hold the seeds of whatever we want to grow in our hands, we can take a moment just to marvel at the miraculous ingenuity that is a seed. Each seed's interior contains every bit of information needed to bring forth a magnificent tree, or a glorious flower, or an abundance of food. It is no different with us.

We are endowed by our Creator with everything that we need inside of us to fulfill our individual and collective purposes in life.

When we walk in the light of the reality that everything we need is within us to do the work we are called to do, we become co-creators with the God who moves mountains.

St. Catherine's quiet interior life of prayer came into being like a thunderclap in the world around her, manifesting as peace, reconciliation, healing, and change where there had been conflict, division, and corruption.

How could St. Catherine, a single woman, negotiate truces among warring factions, overhaul a stubborn institution steeped in tradition, and physically move a global power that refused to budge?

What miracle made one person accomplish these things?

St. Catherine tells us her secret: that by continually entering into relationship with God, her thoughts and prayers became words and actions.

A seed may be the complete package of a future plant, but it needs water and light to grow – it requires the activating agents of those elements to become all that it is meant to be.

We have everything we need already dwelling within us to confront the powers, institutions, and factions of our time.

In the lifeblood of the Eucharist, in the life-giving waters of Baptism, and by the illuminating light of prayer, we receive the quickening life force of the Holy Spirit, the Triune God.

Alone, we may feel like empty seed husks.

What can I do alone to reverse the devastation of climate change?

How can I possibly confront the evils of racism all by myself?

How can I reconcile relationships that seem broken beyond repair?

What difference can I make in an institution that resists change?

It's true. We can't do any of these things alone. Neither could St. Catherine.

She moved mountains with God's help, as one woman strengthened by the deep knowledge of the presence of God within her.

When we survey the seemingly insurmountable mountains in our lives, we can remember St. Catherine's secret, the secret that Jesus revealed to us in the lilies and the birds:

that everything we need to fulfill our good purpose in this life is already within us,

and the animating life force of the Holy Spirit is always flowing in and through us,

lighting our path in prayer, refreshing us in baptism, feeding and nourishing us with the holy food of Christ.

We can take strength from this truth, and persevere in resisting worry, for as the psalm* says,

"In God I trust and will not be afraid, for what can mortals do to me?"

For you, O God, have rescued my soul from death and my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living."

AMEN.

– Kathleen Schmidt, April 29, 2021 AMDG

*Psalm 56:10, 12