

“God Knows You”
Rev. Dr. Scott Paczkowski

Alright, how many of you saw Beyoncé jump off of her yacht? Not one of you. You guys have got to do more social media! Keep up with me, man. [Laughter] (I watched it on YouTube - I think it was.) Beyoncé was jumping off her yacht and I thought that was pretty good. That was higher than what the Olympians were doing - off the platform diving. She was half-way down, and what was Jay Z doing? He was taking her picture. Why couldn't he have sucked it up and jumped off that thing? [Laugh.] That was the first thought I had. Then I went, “That is one huge yacht. Now I know how the one percent live.” It kind of bothered me a little bit, because I don't care what you do or how much money you make - but that just seemed a little inappropriate. I mean that thing [yacht] was as big as this Sanctuary. She was jumping off the top, so I was impressed. But, man, that is a big boat.

Then I remembered, it's been a weird week. I have had a number of different millennials come in and visit, or I ran into them and we were visiting about this, that or the other thing - and they were all crabbing. (Like all of us - we are crabbing about politics. But I won't get into that. I don't have to go on anymore.) But then we went on to talk about other things. About how hard it is to make a living now, about all of the frustrations they have. This happened at least 3-4 times this week.

Then I went back (and I'm going through social media because apparently I have to do this for you guys too - because you don't keep up) [Laughter], and I caught an article in the New York Times - it was August 19th, so just a couple of days ago. It was [about] a woman who is living in Seattle - raised in New York City. Her name is Jillian Boshart. She is 31 years old and [she] described in the article her life as a millennium. She said, “It all started out with my mother and father who made a good living. They were saving and doing everything right, saving money for my college from the time I was really young. Then, all of a sudden in 2000, or shortly after, we had the .com crash.”

They [Jillian's parents] lost almost all of her college money. Then her dad, who had been a nurse for 35 years, lost his job. Then her sister and brother-in-law, in 2009, with the whole crisis, with the Great Recession, they lost their house - all in one family. She said, “I don't feel safe. I feel anxious *all* of the time. When is the other shoe going to drop?”

“That is how I live my life,” she said in this article. And, she said, she didn't think she was alone. She went on to complain, (she really complained well!). She said, “I have this sense of discomfort. Now we have these soaring costs of living in Seattle, and the reinvention of the tech world is very up and down - very turbulent. The clamor of national politics makes me want to give up and move to Canada. That was on the Sunday Morning show today about why we shouldn't move to Canada. I listened because I was trying to find a reason not to move to Canada.”

She said many are terrified of death and worried about their economic future, and she said here is why: The writer of the article said, “Student loan burdens have increased nationally since the recession, and the National Reserve of Atlanta said that student loans have tripled between 2004 and 2012.”

(You see what you have to look forward to. Depressing isn't it?)

Student loans alone have a debt alone now in this country of over a trillion - not a billion - but a trillion dollars. Some of these kids, when they get out of college [if] they can't get the job of their dreams, will spend their entire lives paying back the debt just to get them educated enough to find some sort of job. How frustrating! Because of that, millennials have had to put off buying a house, even getting married. Older people are saying this generation is horrible because you don't get married. They don't do this, they don't do that, the way we did. Folks, they want to - they can't. There are so many things weighing them down and, on top of that, they have never known not to be scared of terrorism. They have never known what it was like to say good-bye at the airport, watch your loved one get on a plane and not know if it was safe.

It was great when I was young, I didn't feel scared of anything. I was too stupid to not know I couldn't go to any college I wanted to; and we didn't have all of the fears, all of the anxieties or frustrations. If there was a one percent, there was not nearly as many of them, and if there were, we didn't know about them because there was no way to find out about them. We didn't have social media. And so I pity young people, in a way, because what they have to go through is nothing like my generation had to.

She continued: Unemployment for people under the age of 25 is twice as high as everyone else; so you get all of these school loans and not only can you not get the good jobs that pay them off; you may not have any job. Most millennials are not living in their parents' basement because they like it - you are not that fun to live with, folks. They are stuck and it hurts. Jillian said, there are so many things you can be anxious about and it's an anxious time.

A recent poll of 18-29 year olds at the Harvard Institute of Politics found that nearly half agreed with the statement that politics today is no longer able to meet the challenges of this world, and they have given up on capitalism and socialism. They literally have no answer. They have a lot of fears and little hope.

In that same article, they interviewed a 27-year-old fireman named Jakob Lundy. He said, "I'm so fearful of the future." He said, "A shakeup is coming. Things are going to have to burn before they get better." And then I realized that we are talking about Hebrews. This is an apocalyptic passage, but it is different than Revelation. In the book of Revelation it was written to provide comfort for those people who were being abused by the Roman Empire. So, all of that apocalyptic literature was all symbols and color and everything, to keep Rome from knowing what the Christians were writing. It was like a code, and it was to comfort them because those days were not going to last forever, and God was going to protect them. But in the sermon to the Hebrews it is different. It is still apocalyptic, but this time, instead of comforting the people it was chastising them, it was admonishing them - warning them - that their actions were creating an environment that was painful for themselves and others.

That is what all of that wonderful imagery was about. It compared the old way to the new way. Here was the comfort in the midst of the admonishment: it's going to get better folks; and you are saying to the Hebrews, you had the old way with all of the consuming fire. God used to burn the people to death - all of the pain and suffering. The covenant - the old

covenant – was: you behave, you follow the law, or you die. But now we have a new covenant: the writer of Hebrews in his sermon was saying, “Now I have a new covenant and the fire will not destroy you. It will purify you. It will make you better.” Now, as much bad news as I have given you about how the world you live in kind of stinks right now, there is an amazing hope.

Something else along with fear that I never had to experience, when I was young because we didn’t have all of these problems: It was in many ways a selfish time. I graduated from high school in 1981, and in 1981 we were far beyond the 1960s. We were not flower children. I had a draft card, but I wasn’t afraid, so I didn’t burn it. I just had to register at the Post Office. I was not socially conscious, and I’m willing to bet 99 percent of the people that graduated around the same time I did were not real socially conscious either.

Out of all of the bad stuff come some remarkably good things. The fire that burns away the problems that we have - the one percent that have way too much and having very little concern about the average person, the struggles it has with people not being able to get health care, or taking 25 years to pay off a school loan, or not being able to get married because they don’t have enough to even provide (and don’t want to move in with their family in the basement) have created something else: A world where we need to improve it. They see the problems and they are responding.

God is still at work even when we don’t see it every day, and that has been that way in history. In Hebrews they were talking about the difference between Moses and Jesus, and how much better it has gotten. But even the people out there that are even older than I am, know that we had our moments. Many of you remember, if you have gray enough hair [to know] that Hitler looked like he was going to win at one point and what was “National Socialism” ended up looking very appealing to many Americans - not just the Germans. We saw it in the 1990s. Milosevic - he was Serbian – [and] ethnic cleansing. We have seen it in Africa. We have seen it in Europe. Brutality is not new but I think this generation – this younger generation - is going to say “stop” and not put up with it the same way.

In 1963 (this is off the top of my head), when Khrushchev’s ships were headed to Cuba, and Kennedy said, “No,” I was a toddler, so I don’t remember, but my mother tells me that the world - especially in this country - held its breath for hour, upon hour, upon precious hour, and by all rights we shouldn’t have survived.

Perhaps, in our darkest hour, God reaches out and says, “Enough!” But what Hebrews says, admonishingly and with warning, [is] it shouldn’t have to get that far.

Every one of us should say, “Stop. This is enough,” when it comes to such a vastly inappropriate way in which we have handled dollars between the one percent and everyone else. Between the ways we have handled certain ethnic groups and treated [them] as if they were not human. The struggles we have in this world with terrorism. “Enough.”

And, I believe God is using the pain of the younger generation to burn away the impurities of materialism, selfishness and self-absorption, so that you will come up with ways that we haven’t been able to or haven’t been willing to [do], to “stop” the inequality, prejudice and hatred.

I pray that God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, will use your minds and your hearts to do what we haven't figured out yet, and I believe in these coming years we don't have to be despairing and sad. We can be happy, but not a silly happy, a grateful happy, because God has used each and every one of you to do what we could not. That is God's promise. We need to pray for them, and we need to do our part. And I believe we can, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.