

“Don’t Worry”

Matthew 6: 24-34

We continue this week with Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. And with just a few verses, we realize that this whole discipleship thing doesn’t get any easier for us as followers of Jesus. At first, in reading this particular text, we love it. It talks about the birds of the air. It talks about the lilies of the field. It beckons us to put our trust in God. This text’s beautiful cadence settles us down into a calm meditative state, a state of peace which we seek, a state of oneness with the universe we hope to achieve, a state of mindfulness which gives us glimpses into Kingdom of Heaven...that is until our minds start going over our to do list for the day. There are bills to be paid. Errands to be run. Wandering the Versailles Kroger, finding the one item we need. Our minds remember that there are piles of laundry waiting for us when we get home...Soon we drift towards the questions of life: “Did I forget to pick up the dry-cleaning?” “What did I forget to do today?” “I know I put that piece of paper in a safe place so I wouldn’t lose it. Now, where was that safe place?”

With each passing question, this calm state of peace and mindfulness which at one point was so close is now elusive. This is especially true as our cell phones continue to keep buzzing, letting us know we have a text or an email coming in or

as our technology continues bing, alerting us to a news story happening in our nation or world. Each new alert brings a new worry. Each new worry is filled with anxious thoughts. With every new worry, we realize Jesus' words are slipping farther and farther away from us, each new worry leading us away from that calm state of peace and mindfulness which we all crave.

Worry? Us? Nope! (Please hear the sarcasm in my voice)

For many of us, worry has become a prominent part of our everyday existence. We worry about aging parents. We worry about our grades in school. We worry about our kids. We worry about being liked by others. We worry if we are forgetting anything. We worry if we are going to outlive our resources in retirement. We worry about being safe. We worry about what is in our food. We worry about....I'll let you fill in the blank.

With each new worry, we become more and more anxious. The disconnect between Jesus' words and us as his followers, this disconnect grows larger and larger until it seems impossible that we will ever fulfill our calling. We brush off Jesus' calming, mindful words as being irrelevant in our day and time. We say things like Jesus didn't know our world and the problems we face. We say things like There is no way he could have known how the world was going to change, the advances in technology, and the natural disasters that are becoming a common

occurrence. We even say things like Jesus' words have no meaning in the 21st century.

So we continue to worry, becoming more and more anxious each and every day.

Which brings me to the question: How is all this worrying working out for us? It hasn't helped us live any longer. It hasn't solved any problems. It hasn't fixed anything. The only thing worrying really has ever done is raise our heart rates and stress us out so much that we can't even function.

And if we are being honest, it certainly hasn't helped us become the people of love and grace which God created us and calls us to be. All this worrying hasn't helped. Yes, I know the irony of me saying these words. Me, one of the biggest worriers is saying "Don't Worry". Me who if I don't have anything to worry about creates stuff to worry about is saying... "Don't be anxious".

No, I haven't had some life-changing revelation nor am I pretending to have it all figured out. Like you, I struggle with this text. It calls me to let go. It calls me to do something that is so out of character for me that I honestly can't fathom how to actually live out its advice in my life.

However in moments like these moments, moments when I am so overwhelmed, I am always grateful for the Spirit's gentle beckoning, reminding me

to take a deep breath, reminding me to hold onto the promises given to me, given to us by a God who loves us more than we can ever imagine. The Spirit whispers to us in moments of worry and anxiousness, reminding us that all will be okay. We may not know how or when but as people of faith, we do know, no matter what, it will always be okay.

And for me as a person of faith, I can think of no other voice that I need to hear more in these moments of worry and anxiety. No other voice that I need more in the moments when I am so overwhelmed that I don't know which way is up. I need the Spirit of God to break through to me in times such as these and remind me just exactly who holds me in care and love.

Now I can tell you that in moments like these, moments when it feels all too much, God always comes through. It may be a gentle reminder of the sun warming my face or it may be a voice of a loved one who simply says to me, "Stop it. You are not helping the situation with all the worrying you are doing."

But this I do know, time and time again, the Spirit of God always comes through with a reminder of just exactly who I am, with a reminder of whose I am.

That's the beauty of this text. It is deceptively simple with its talk of birds and lilies but its words are powerful reminders of God's bountiful care.

You see, Jesus isn't calling us to be irresponsible or careless with this call to not worry. Rather, he is inviting us to address each day's problems as they come, confident that our lives are in the hands of a loving God who made us, who surrounds us with grace, who has got things under control. As followers of Jesus, this whole "Don't worry, Don't be anxious" invitation is a call to address our divided attention between what the world values and what the Kingdom of God values.

Let me explain. Usually we hear me say from this pulpit that faith is a both/and sort of thing. And normally that is the case...except in this instance. If we look at verse 24, Jesus tells his disciples, tells us that this whole worry thing is grounded in trying to serve two masters-the world and the Kingdom of God. Jesus wants us to know that this is an impossible task. We simply cannot do it. And if we try, the struggle will pull us apart each and every time.

Because as we all know, the world always wants more-more money, more time, more stuff, more of our attention. It is never satisfied. The world will not stop until it has consumed us, consumed God's creation and drained us of our spirits. If we choose to serve the world, we will never find rest. We will never find peace from our worry. We will only become more and more anxious.

But...But if we serve only the Kingdom of God, we become centered on, centered in the presence of God once more. We become connected once more to our God who tells us that there is more than enough love, more than enough resource, more than enough space at the Table to welcome all of God's children. If we center ourselves on God, a reversal of values takes place, a reversal that brings us closer to finding rest and peace for our weary worried souls.

By serving God, By keeping God as our center, no longer will we look at people or things or even God's creation through monetary values. Instead rather we will look at these things through the values of the Kingdom of God, values like love and grace, values that call us to first think about how we relate to each other, how we are connected to one another, how we are accountable to and for each other. "If we accept the Kingdom values (relationship values) of all creation and of ourselves, then God becomes primary again and God's concerns for the world become our concerns." Then we can begin to embrace a calmer vision of God's abundance, an abundance that sustains us, that nourishes us, just like it does the birds of the air and the lilies of the fields.

Now, I will admit that this would be a really great time for a sermon illustration, an illustration that captures just how we can do that. But like I said, I don't have all the answers. I am still trying to figure out how to live this whole "Don't worry" out in my life. Too many times, I find myself falling back into a

pattern of saying, “Okay, God, I’ll turn things over to you, but if you would just do things my way, that would be great and I’ll be much happier.” Usually when I make this request, all I hear is silence and yes, maybe a chuckle coming from the universe because really how many times does it take for me to learn that God is God and I am not.

So I guess, in all humility, all I can say is that as we continue to grapple with the call of discipleship, to trust our God, all I can say is that in times such as these, times when it feels like the world is overwhelming us, in times such as these when it feels like worry and anxiety are taking over, in times such as these when we cringe at turning on the TV, answering the phone, checking our email, even cringe at looking at Facebook, because of what we will hear or read on the other end, in times such as these when it feels like fear is winging, all I can say is that there is no better time than for us to just take a breath, for us to listen to the Spirit, to listen for the Spirit’s calming and peace filled words, and then begin practicing what we preach.

May it be. Amen.