

Matthew 6:25-33

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost (Series B, Proper 12)

Lessons for the Day: Genesis 9:8-17; Ephesians 3:14-21; Mark 6:45-56

The Lord Who Cares

July 29, 2018

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

President Donald Trump once bragged about the number of times he had appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine. He suggested that he had graced the cover more than any other president. It is true that Trump has had 4 covers in the last few months, and now has been on 21 covers, but he still lags behind other presidents, like Richard Nixon, who appeared on 45 covers of the magazine over the years, or Ronald Regan, who graced 39 covers. Bill Clinton and Barak Obama are still ahead of Trump, too. (By the way, the stats I looked at said that Jesus was on the cover of 23 issues). But this is still nothing compared to the visage of Alfred E. Neumann, which has graced over 500 covers of a magazine since the ‘60s. If you don’t know him, Alfred E. Neumann is a cartoon character, and the magazine is called *Mad*. Neumann is the ‘mascot’ of *Mad* Magazine, with his large ears, missing tooth, and one eye drooping below the other. Neumann also has his own catch-phrase: “What, me worry?” I don’t know why that became his motto, but there it was, whenever he was on the cover: “what, me worry?”

Bobby McFerrin has an interesting song that rose to the top of the music charts very quickly, only to fall off the charts almost as quickly. It was a fun, reggae style song called *Don’t Worry. Be Happy*. If only it were that easy! If only we could tell ourselves not to worry. After all, we know that worry can actually destroy us. We live in a day and age when stress and anxiety kills more people than die in accidents. Bookshelves are filled with books dealing with stress, its causes and cures. I’ve been to several symposiums on the care of church workers and their families, because the demands of ministry in the world today are creating a great deal of stress among our workers—and that stress is having its effects, leading to burn-out, heart attacks and depression, even among our clergy.

These things really shouldn’t surprise us. After all, we live in a very stressful world. How can we keep from worrying when there seems to be so much that we have to worry about? People worry about the economy. Personally, I try to think of it this way: my hairline is in recession, my waistline is in inflation, so somehow things must balance out. But it isn’t that easy, is it? In a world that still continues to show upheaval in the job market, we may wonder if we will have a job tomorrow. If we’re not worrying about our jobs, we’re worrying about our families. If we’re not worrying about our family, we worry about politics. If we aren’t worrying about politics, we worry about terrorism, or the environment. We can’t pick up a newspaper today without finding something else that worries us.

In many ways, we have become a nation of worry-warts. Is it any wonder then that Jesus should say to us in our text: *“do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on... Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.”*

It is those very words, “Do not be anxious” that lie behind our sermon request today. The struggles we may have with worry and anxiety can often be uncontrollable and overwhelming. And to simply be told, “Do not be anxious” only seems to make it harder.

Jesus does not want worry to destroy us. Rather, He wants to see us conquer our worry in the only way possible—through our faith in God. He wants us to see that we do not have to worry, because God removes all need for worry from our lives. Jesus is assuring us that there is no need for anxiety, because our loving Father knows our needs and will take care of us.

We were talking about worry one day at the office, and Deaconess Miriam said that whenever one of the grandchildren would say they were worried about something, her grandmother would simply say, "Worry's a sin. Just pray". That is sage and simple advice! Yet it may also be the hardest advice to follow. Worry is much more than just an abstract emotion. It is an evil power that takes control of us. Worry causes us to become obsessed with this world, and the things of this world. It can cause us to look back at the events of the past with recurring doubt so that we ask ourselves, "why did I do that?". "If only I hadn't made that mistake; if only I could live that last week over again." We worry about what we have done; we worry about what we should have done. But our biggest worries are always about the future, and all the things that could happen. We worry about whether or not we will have enough money to get by. We worry about our health; we worry about our mortgage; we worry about what we are going to eat and drink and wear. We worry about what other people think of us. We worry about our children. We worry about worrying. And the more we worry, the more obsessed we become. We see no easy solution to our problems. And we dread the coming of tomorrow, because we are sure things can only get worse.

The word that the Scriptures use for worry means to be divided of mind and distracted in your thoughts. That is exactly what worry does. It divides our minds into little compartments of fear and concern and insecurity. It distracts us so that we are unable to think clearly. Worry keeps us from living in faith. Worry is the exact opposite of faith. When we worry, we are serving two masters: God and our own obsessions. And Jesus tells us just how futile that is in the verse just before our text: "***No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.***" (Matthew 6:24, ESV)

What Jesus wants us to understand is that there is no need to worry, when we know the love that our God has for us. Jesus isn't slapping us in the face, saying, "Stop it! Your worry is wrong!" Rather, He lovingly reminds us that He is a God who cares. The same God who knew the needs of His disciples and walked over the water to reassure them is the God who knows our needs and well provides for us. Jesus does point out that when it comes right down to it worrying is a senseless thing to do. No good has ever come of worrying about anything. It has never solved any of our problems or helped us in any way. Jesus said: ***which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?*** Worry doesn't add to our life—in fact it does the exact opposite. Dr. Charles Mayo, of the famous Mayo Clinic has said, "Worry affects the circulation, the heart, the glands, the whole nervous system. I have never know a man who died from overwork, but many who died from doubt."

Worry does not keep sorrow from coming; it does not change the situations around us. Worry may be a perfectly natural trait for sinful human beings. Unfortunately, it is also a waste of precious time and energy. "Worry," it is said, "never robs tomorrow of its sorrow; it only saps today of its strength." To put it another way, worrying about something has never made a positive difference; its only effects are negative, hurtful and draining upon us.

Jesus turns us from worry to trust—a trust in the love that the Father has for us. He reminds us that the birds don't sow and reap, but God provides for them. The lilies of the field don't toil or spin, but God covers them in beauty. Jesus says: ***if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?***

When Jesus says, "Don't be anxious", He is really saying that we are free from worry and fear in His love and grace. There is no need for worry when we have a God who cares. In our Epistle lesson today, Paul prays: ***that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.***" (Ephesians 3:17–19, ESV) When we "*fear, love and trust in God above all things*", there is no room for worry in our lives. Rather than waste time on worry, we turn to the God who does help His people, and who has demonstrated that help so wonderfully in His Son, Jesus Christ.

And how we need to keep that promise of God in Christ before us all the time! You can be sure that God will care for your needs, because, in His great love, God has already given you more than this world can ever offer. He gave you His Son, to die and rise for you. Jesus came to bring you out of the depths of worry that sin, death and the devil work in this world. Through His death He takes away our sinfulness which separated us from God—including our sinful worrying. Through His resurrection, He gives us life in its fulness with God. Through our Baptism, we have the promise of God that He is our God and we are His people. He knows our needs and will care for each day. Here, at His table, He feeds us with His body and blood to strengthen us as we struggle with worry in this world. We can trust all things into His care and keeping.

Does this mean that nothing is every going to happen that causes us concern? I wish I could tell you that there will never be troubles or concerns in your lives. No, they will come. Each day will have its own issues. But in all of it, you can do what Jesus

urges you to do because of the grace He brings. You can trust in God, who loved you and gave His Son to save you from the only real worry—and that is the eternal death we deserve as sinners.

Our emotions aren't controlled by some sort of switch that we can simply turn off. We can't simply tell ourselves we are going to stop worrying and suddenly everything will be different. But God is here. Christ is risen. The Spirit has been poured out from on high. All this we know by faith as the joyous truth. It remains for us to turn it into joyous spiritual experience, as Jesus says: ***But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*** Amen.