

Sermon Matthew 6:25-33
Day of Thanksgiving B
November 22, 2018
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**In his self-help book on leadership and business acumen,
Author Eitan Sharir notes that stress management experts say
That only 2% of our “worrying time” is spent on things
That might actually be helped by worrying.
40% of worrying is spent on things that never happen.
35% on things that cannot be changed.
15% on things that turn out better than expected.
And 8% on what he calls useless, insignificant worries.**

**So 98% of the time, our worrying doesn’t accomplish anything.
Yet we still worry all the time.**

We continually worry.

**We worry about our treasures, our homes, our possessions.
We worry about our job performance, job stability, job offers.
We worry about finances, about children, about parents.
We worry about our health, our nation, our futures.
We worry about how much we are worrying.**

**With the stress management experts chiming in,
With this text from Matthew,
It seems clear that worry does no good
And should be stopped immediately.**

**But as one who has and still receives professional care
For generalized anxiety,
I find it very difficult when this text in Matthew
Is lifted up as some magic pill to a worry-free life
Simply because Jesus says not to worry.**

And while catchy and fun to sing at karaoke nights,
Bobby McFerrin's simple directive
To not worry and be happy seems almost fantasy.

So, I think it is important for us to carefully note
How Jesus constructs his reflections about worry,
Lest we strive to achieve an impossible goal
Crafted by anything less-than-Gospel-centered
Self-help narratives.

But first, a science experiment.

I have a glass here filled with a gaseous fluid called air.
How will I go about removing the air from this glass?
This won't work (turn it upside down).
This won't work (shake it up and down).
This might (fill with water).

I don't think that we remove worry from our lives
By trying to remove it.

Instead I feel Jesus is inviting us to consider
Pushing it out, displacing it, replacing it with something else.
And, just maybe, that something else is thanksgiving.

Jesus points to the bird of the air

And reminds us that they don't sow or reap or gather into barns.
Birds don't store up treasures in their nest
And yet they are cared for.

Jesus points to the lilies of the field,

And reminds us that they don't toil nor spin for their
Beautiful wrappings
And yet they are more finely dressed than Solomon.

We are not told to *become* like wild birds or plants,
But to look at them and learn from them.

I'm not sure that a bird cares much about God.
I'm not sure that a bird gives God any credit
For providing seeds and worms and other dead animals to eat.
I'm uncertain that a plant in the field has any thoughts
About God providing the nutrients in the soil
Or the rain or the sun that give it life.

But *we* can.
We can recognize the wonder of God's hands
In action in creation for the good of all things.

While the psalmists and indeed Joel commend
Praise and rejoicing from the very earth, fields, and pastures,
It is Zion, the people of God, who are called upon
To recognize God's handiwork in the cosmos
Give thanks the abundance of grace heaped upon grace.

We will worry about things.
But in his call not to worry,
Jesus is not calling us all to abandon our lives
And move to the desert to join a monastery
Or to empty our savings accounts and 401(k)s.
Rather, he is addressing the basis
For excessive worry and anxiety
That can result from a life separated from God.

The Gospel calls us to a different set of values,
Different priorities: where accumulation or disbursement
Is not what keeps us up at night.

But rather a striving for the Kingdom of God.
A striving for justice, peace, reconciliation, repositioning.
A relocation not to the heart of our anxieties
But to the heart of God's love for all people.

Richard Beaton of Fuller Seminary in Pasadena says it like this:

"The life of discipleship is characterized by a life
that is singular in its pursuit of God.
To live in accordance with God's reign means
That we are a community within broader society that is
aligned with a different values system.
We do not strive or worry endlessly about our needs.
Rather, in entrusting our life to God, we look to God
To provide them for us, as God does for all of creation."
Birds, lilies, you and me.

We worry and worrying adds nothing to our lives.
But giving thanks...that displaces the worry just enough
That we are broken open in praise and rejoicing
For all the ways God provides
For our living, our moving,
Our doing of Kingdom values throughout the world.

"Society has changed a great deal since the time of Jesus.
Definitions of poverty, wealth, and the good life
Are much different today than they were then.

"Images and messages from advertisers, media,
And sometimes even friends and family
Encourage us to consume.

"Further, such messages can make us feel unhappy
With what we have in the hope that we will

buy and consume more.

“The other side of this equation includes the harsh reality of economic failure.

“Media reports are still replete with sad stories of homes being foreclosed upon, and financial tragedy striking both individuals and businesses. The heart-rending effects of poverty and homelessness still affect our society.”

**It is more than enough to make us worry.
But God promises to take care of us
So that we can take care of God’s
peace and justice in the world.**

**We are washed, fed, and equipped to go out and spend our energy
On the things of the Kingdom that matter...
The things that lead to life for those who have none,
The things that lead to reconciliation where there is none,
The things that lead to peace when there is none.**

**And just like the water molecules together pushing out the air,
We do not do any of this alone.
We are washed, fed, and equipped
As a community of works in and for the Kingdom.**

**Verse 33 is plural and active.
In the words of my people:
“All y’all keep striving for the Kingdom...”**

**If it ends up that 2% of worry is indeed helpful,
Then we’ve got plenty of energy for that.**