

An Invitation to Trust in God

“Do not worry about your life...” Matthew 6:25

Matthew 6:19-34
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

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The year was 1988 – 20 years ago. A particular song won that year's Grammy Awards for “Record of the Year,” “Song of the Year,” and for “Best Male Pop Vocal Performance.” Do you know what song I'm referring to? Let me share some of the lyrics:

*Here's a little song I wrote
You might want to sing it note for note...
In every life we have some trouble
When you worry you make it double
Don't worry, be happy.*

I'm sure many, if not most, of you are familiar with this song by Bobby McFerrin, “**Don't Worry, Be Happy.**”

I hated that song. Not only because I found it musically annoying, but mainly because at that time in my life I had recently lost my career as a petroleum geologist – as did tens of thousands of others in the mid 80's, due in part to when oil plunged to \$10 a barrel. (What a difference from today when it's gotten as high as \$150 a barrel.)

As a result, I lost the house that I had built, my car, and my entire saving account and all my investments. Since I didn't even have enough money to rent an apartment on my own, I was living with a friend from my home church, who graciously let me stay with him for free.

Needless to say, I wasn't very fond of the lyrics, “Don't worry, be happy.” Neither did I care much for the scripture passage that is today's Gospel lesson, the conclusion to what has become to be known as the Sermon on the Mount.

In Matthew 6:25, Jesus admonishes his listeners: “**Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear.**” Well I'm sorry, I literally got to the point where once I had to choose between food for me or for my cat. I chose the cat. So yes, I was indeed worried about what I was going to eat.

Infinitely worse than my situation was then, however, way too many people around the world are actually starving to death every day. **How, then, can take a scripture passage that admonishes us not to worry about basic provision in life seriously?**

In our own debt-ridden society, and with the skyrocketing price of gasoline and food, coupled with declining home values (for those fortunate enough to be able to own a home), show me someone who isn't worried and anxious about personal and family finances.

And what about the issues of our church finances? I've already become a bit worried at the numbers of times I've heard, "But I'm afraid we don't have it in the church budget," as true as that may be." It doesn't help that it seems like Presbyterians are generally worriers by nature.

Yet right there in verse 34 we read, **"So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today."** It sounds, then, like we all might need to take a closer look at today's biblical text to see if we cannot get something valuable out of it for our church and personal lives.

It's interesting that our biblical text begins with a teaching about our **priorities**, especially as they relate to materialism. Jesus says, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal."

And then comes the main point, **"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."** This warning is actually good advice. **We are asked to consider what it is that we treasure most: that which can be destroyed or stolen, or that which has eternal qualities like love, compassion, justice, friendship, fellowship, charity and acts of kindness.**

This passage about our focus on where our treasure lies is followed by the very familiar verse, "No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." (Matt. 6:24). The word commonly translated as "wealth" or "money," is the Aramaic word *mammon* that can also be translated more broadly as "possessions" or "property."

It's important to note that Jesus is *not* speaking directly against people who are wealthy, or even money itself. Rather, his statement is about whether our priority is in serving God, or the obsessive pursuit of wealth and possessions. Most likely, then, Jesus may have been encouraging the poor while challenging the rich.

This is also a good warning that when it comes to a sense of our own **self-worth**, we must not base it on, or equate it with, our acquisitions and possessions, or the amount of money in our checking and savings accounts. **You and I have worth in God's eyes simply because we are children of God, not because we have more or less than someone else.**

In his commentary, *Matthew*, Presbyterian preacher extraordinaire, Thomas Long, writes:

What our hearts really desire, of course, is to count – to count for *something* and to count *to someone*. To come to the end of a day

– or the end of a life – with the satisfaction of having stood for what is good, with the joy of having been loved and having loved well in return, with the memory of having shown mercy, and with the peace of having walked with God – these are the true treasures, the treasures of the kingdom [of God], a fortune no thief can plunder.

And he wisely concludes, **“Living the good life and living a good life pull in opposite directions.”** Ultimately, whether you and I choose to serve God or wealth depends upon **where we place our trust, and where we place our sense of security – in God, or in our possessions.** It is fascinating that this closing section of the Sermon on the Mount on wealth ends with a statement not about wealth at all, but about worry: “So do not worry about tomorrow” (Matt. 6:34).

St. Augustine once commented, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in God.” Therefore, our restless anxiety over what tomorrow may or may not hold [personally as well as a congregation] may be a sign that our hearts have not yet found their true home.

Now I admit, there is a kind of worry about the coming day that is normal, even healthy. Tomorrow’s presentation at work, or job interview, or car repair bill, or medical appointment, or upcoming trip, is bound to provoke concern and some anxiety, and **this command “do not worry about tomorrow” is not an invitation to not prepare for what tomorrow may bring.**

Rather, it speaks to the deeper, more basic fear that something is out there in the future that can destroy our basic worth as a human being, something finally stronger than God’s care, some silent killer shark swimming toward us from the future. Perhaps it would help to pause and simply breathe!

Let us try hard to free ourselves, then, of worry; the preoccupation with and the draining of our mental, spiritual and physical energy and powers with things that are future, hypothetical, and most often beyond our control. For worry sees only the obstacles (actual or imaginary) and meditates on all the possible disastrous possibilities, while neglecting the fact of God’s divine care and provision.

This is what I would like you to remember and take away from this sermon and scripture passage – it’s what I finally learned, and came to trust, during those difficult post-geology years: **Whatever tomorrow brings, it will also bring God with it!**

Work hard to be content to leave tomorrow’s trouble to tomorrow, to roll up our sleeves, and as children of God face the problems that walk through the doors of our homes, our workplace, and our church today. Or in the wise words of the **Serenity Prayer**, credited to the great 20th century theologian Reinhold Niebuhr:

*God, grant us
– the serenity to accept the things we cannot change*

– *the courage to change the things we can*
– *and the wisdom to know the difference.*

Accept the invitation to trust in God – that God will provide. “But strive first for the kingdom of God...and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matt 6:33 NRSV).

So what do you know, perhaps that silly little song really was good advice after all, **“Don’t worry, be happy!”**

Amen.

Church bulletin blooper: “Don’t let worry kill you off – let the Church help.”