

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Matthew 6:24-34

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St. Peter's - Lafayette Hill, PA.

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### “You of Little Faith”

Don't Worry! Easier said than done. Of all the living things that God created, we human beings are the only ones that worry. And we worry about everything - gas prices, the stock market, taxes, jobs, marriages, parents worry about children, children worry about parents. You name it, somebody is worrying about it. As of yesterday, four of the top five best selling non-fiction hardback books on Amazon.com were dealing with subjects we worry about - health, change, relationships, and money.

Jesus says we shouldn't worry. Listen to him again: “...do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?” As usual, what he says makes sense. We do worry too much, especially those of us in this affluent society who seem to have less to worry about than so many others in the world. And the result is a stack of problems that we constantly bring on ourselves.

The British born movie actor David Niven was a worrier and a habitual nail-biter. Once he received a postcard written by his friend, Noel Coward, who was traveling in Italy. The card showed a picture of the statue of Venus de Milo and said, "You see what will happen if you keep on biting your nails."

Some statistics point out that more people die in America as a result of suicide (caused by stress, duress, anxiety and worry) than who die from the five most common contagious diseases combined. Twice as many people die by suicide as die by homicide. Fifty percent more people die because of ulcers than die because of murder. Worry causes heart trouble, high blood pressure, some forms of asthma, rheumatism, ulcers, the common cold, thyroid malfunction, arthritis, migraine headaches, blindness, and a host of stomach disorders. Doctors today are quite candid in admitting that more than half of the patients in hospitals are there as much because of the accumulated effects of mental problems caused by worrying, as anything else.

So Jesus was right! It's not good to worry. Obviously, it is a problem that is not unique to us. The crowd that sat listening to Jesus on that Judean hillside could identify with it. Otherwise, he never would have brought it up. But, as was typical of his teaching, Jesus put the problem into perspective by pointing out some things that everybody could understand. He pointed toward the sky and said, "Look at the birds of the air (those little insignificant sparrows); they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"

That made sense. It has always been true that the God who has provided life also provides the necessities to keep that life going. The point, of course, is not that the birds and animals are taken care of without work; that is obviously not true - it has been said that no one works harder than the average sparrow to make a living. The message is that they do not worry about that living. And if they, who are so much lower than we are in God's scheme of creation, do not have to worry - why should we?

And what good does worrying do?! That's the point of what Jesus is saying, "can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?" Not one, obviously. In fact, excessive worry has the *opposite* effect: not only will worry not add to your length of years, it will probably considerably subtract from them... not to mention affect their quality.

Jesus continues by telling us to stop worrying about what we will wear or what we will eat. But the necessities of life, the length of life, the quality of life - these are all things that tend to worry people a great deal. But Jesus' message is clear: none of them should particularly concern us because the God who gives us life in the first place *will* be in control of all the rest. The Lord sums up the problem of worry in one little phrase: "you of little faith."

That is what he has been driving at all along. He has not been trying to tell us that we should not plan ahead; he has not been trying to say that we should not be careful; he has not been trying to say that we should be totally unconcerned about what kind of life we have. He just does not want us to come to the place where we begin to think that we are in this all by ourselves. That is the problem that people without faith have. That's why Jesus says, "Do not be anxious saying 'What shall we eat' or 'What shall we drink' or 'What shall we wear?' We have a loving God who "knows that you need them all," one who is in it with us to such an extent - that even the things that we never think about... things like birds and lilies and grass... are taken care of as well. If we remember that, and believe that, we will not have to worry.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Century Roman Emperor Julian the Apostate tried every way he could to suppress Christianity, but met nothing but failure because of the distinctive lifestyle he found among believers. He told his officials, "We ought to be ashamed. Not one beggar is to be found among the Jews, and those godless Galileans (the Christians) feed not only their own people - but ours as well."

We have a great deal to learn from those early Christians who, in spite of real reason to worry... worry about property and possessions being confiscated, worry about being tortured, worry about even sacrificing life itself, in spite of all that, they could be concerned enough about others to look after those needs rather than their own. But then, did they not have the promise of Jesus. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things (the food and clothing and so on) will be yours as well? Of course, they did. It's true that we also have that promise, but the difference seems to be that they believed it far more than we seem to. The birds believe it. There was a poet puts it beautifully: Said the robin to the sparrow, Said the sparrow to the robin, I should

really like to know Friend, I think that it must be Why these anxious human beings That they have no heavenly Father Rush around and worry so. Such as cares for you and me.

What Jesus wants us to know is that we do indeed have such a heavenly Father, and because of that we do not have to spend all our time worrying about the necessities of life.

I read of an insensitive and atheistic old witch who one time chided a poverty-stricken young boy about his faith in a loving God. She said, "If God really loved you, God would see that you had some decent shoes." That little boy, with more insight than most of us have, replied, "God told someone, - but they forgot."

latest or our cars are the newest. Peter Marshall once prayed, "Help us to do our very best this day and be content with today's troubles so that we shall not borrow the troubles of tomorrow. Save us from the sin of worrying, lest stomach ulcers be the badge of our *lack of faith*."

When Jesus saw the Disciples worry, he simply said, "You of little faith." A lot about how we live has to do with the size of our Faith. Lately people have been worrying about Gas prices. It's becoming a concern - and it won't be fixed in a day but after enough SUV's are replaced with economy cars, and more people buy a Trans-Pass to ride the train for half the amount they'd pay to fill their tank, the worrying will subside. And who knows, with the worrying about the rising cost of food prices people just may eat out less and start eating more at home - as a family - around the same dinner table at the same time! And perhaps the high-priced name brand label isn't what we will be looking at on the designer clothes. But we will have clothing. God assures us of that. And hopefully, our faith will continue to be strong enough that we will take funds from areas of our life other than our offerings to the Church.

Newspaper columnist Molly Ivins tells a wonderful story of two little boys in East Texas: John Henry Falk and Boots Cooper. In their games they were Texas Rangers, so John Henry's mother sent them down to the chicken house to rout out a snake that had been doing considerable damage there. They mounted their brooms and galloped down to the chicken house to investigate. They looked all around the nests on the bottom shelf, but could not find a snake. Then they stood on tiptoe to see the upper shelf and found themselves face to face with a big ol' chicken snake. They were so scared that they both tried to run out of the hen house at the same time, doing considerable damage both to themselves and to the hen house. Watching the commotion from the front porch, Mrs. Falk could not help but laugh. When the boys finally made it back to the house she said; "Boys, what is wrong with you? You know perfectly well a chicken snake cannot hurt you." One of the little boys said, "Yes, ma'am, but there's some things'll scare you so bad, you hurt yourself."

I guess it all comes down to what President Roosevelt once said, "There is nothing to fear - but fear itself." Jesus simply said: "Do not worry about your life." But maybe the Apostle

Paul sums it up best in his letter to the Phillipians: "Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Amen