

Pastor's Message – 3/7/21  
Sermon on the Mount: Do Not *Worry*  
Matthew 6:25-34

In Guatemala and parts of Mexico, they have something called a worry doll. These very small dolls, usually less than two inches high, are made of wire and cloth and are given to children as "friends" with whom they can share their worries and fears. The dolls are said to be rooted in Mayan folklore which tells of the sun god giving a princess a gift to help her face her fears. Mostly tourists buy the dolls today. Some child psychologists use a similar approach to a child's anxiety, offering a doll to a child as an imaginary friend to whom they can tell their dark secrets.

It starts early, this anxiety we have for tomorrow. Our fear of the future can paralyze us in the present, leaving us burdened or even immobilized. Americans spend over \$2 billion a year on anti-anxiety medication (T.M. Luhrmann, "The Anxious Americans," *NY Times*, July 8, 2015). We are among the most anxious and medicated nations on earth. We worry about having enough money, our health, our appearance, our relationships, our jobs and just about everything else. We can even worry about whether we should be worried or not.

Almost 500 years ago, French essayist Michel de Montaigne wrote: "My life has been filled with terrible misfortune, most of which never happened." In other words, it was all in his imagination. His worst fears never materialized. Anxiety is frightened imagination focused on the worst of what might happen.

People in Jesus' day could get anxious about the future, too. Their anxieties were more basic than most of ours. (What will they eat? What will they drink? What will they wear?) But they followed the same line. Their fears drove them to imagine the worst.

In the teachings of Jesus, fear is often the enemy of faith. One would expect it to be doubt, but it is often fear. So, for instance, when his disciples panic as a storm comes up over Lake Galilee, he asks them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" (Mt 8:26). So, when Jesus addresses our anxieties, it's not surprising that he makes it an issue of faith. He has us look to God's creation, how God takes care of the birds of the air and the lilies and grass of the field.

There is a beautiful lesser to greater argument here. It runs as follows: If God the Creator cares for the birds and lilies and grass he has created, how much more will God, our heavenly Father, care for us, his children. There is also a beautiful irony here, that these lesser creatures of God should teach us nervous human beings, the crown of God's creation, something about God's provision. A little sparrow here, a fragrant lily there, tasseled grasses blowing

gently in the wind—they are a chorus of witnesses to the trustworthy care God gives every corner of creation.

The writer C.S. Lewis, in his study of the Bible, identified four great analogies in the Bible for God’s love toward us. They are in ascending order:

1. First is the love of an artist toward her creation, the way a potter loves her newly created cup, fresh off the wheel. This is God’s relationship with birds and lilies, his creations.
2. Second is the love of a master for an animal, the way a shepherd loves his sheep, the way you may love your dog, or even your cat.
3. Third is the love of a parent for a child, the way a waiting dad graciously welcomes home a prodigal son.

This is where we fit in here in the Sermon on the Mount. We are our heavenly Father’s children and he will love us to the end. And,

4. Fourth is the love of one spouse for the other, how faithfully they support and encourage one another (C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*).

So, Jesus is telling us that the antidote to worry and anxiety is trust in God’s proven love for us. He is not saying that bad things won’t happen to us, nor is he saying that we can sit back and wait to be fed. This is no permission to give up working for what we eat or to stop praying for what we need. This is Jesus saying that trust in God’s prevailing, persistent love displaces worry. No wonder the apostle Paul can write, “Don’t be anxious about anything, but by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Phil 4:6). Acts of trust like prayer and thanksgiving push aside worry.

And there is more. Jesus says that we are to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (v 33). To “seek first the kingdom” is to value our relationship with our heavenly Father over everything else. It is to love the Lord most deeply. To seek “his righteousness” is to delight in and follow the Lord’s will wholeheartedly.

Hip deep in Lent, it is somehow less overwhelming to hear Jesus’ call to trust. We live closer to the cross these days and find our truth there, truth under the cross. Under the cross, close to his dying, we can hear his whispers and shouts. And at the end of his suffering, we can hear him say, “Father ...” In dying he falls asleep in his Father’s arms, entrusting tomorrow and the next day to his providence. It may seem like an ending. It may seem like tomorrow has arrived and the worst has happened. Not so fast, though. Here at the cross the Father is listening, caring, and still providing for his beloved Son and for us, his beloved children. This is a Father who can be trusted. So, we can put down our worry dolls and rest in his love. Amen.