

**“Who Wouldn’t Worry?!”**  
**Matthew 6: 24-34**

“Don’t worry about your life! Don’t worry about what you will eat or what you will wear. Consider the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. If they trust God for the future, shouldn’t you?!” If you happen to be a worrier, can you imagine anything more frustrating than being told not to worry?!

I think the world is just divided into worriers and non-worriers. I’m not a worrier – my wife says that’s because I don’t understand the situation – I’m just a “happy little duh.” I think it’s because my mother was a classic worrier, and I witnessed close at hand the needless agony she put herself through. She “catastrazized” every situation and anticipated the worse possible outcome. There was an off-repeated family story from the family moving business when a driver went to sleep behind the wheel and turned a truck over wrecking the furniture that he was moving. My mother upon receiving the phone call went immediately to visions of bankruptcy and said, “I guess I can survive by renting out a room in our house, but I don’t know what your father will do.” Of course the insurance took care of the damage and my mother’s anxiety was absurd, but thereafter, if there was ever a family crisis, my sister or I would remind my mother, saying “Well, I could always rent out a room, but I don’t know what you will do.” It was our way of reminding her to “consider the lilies” and learn not to worry. And of course, it did absolutely no good! She was a worrier all her life.

Someone passed on to me an internet piece entitled “Why Parents Drink”. Have you seen it? It tells of a father passing his son’s bedroom only to discover a note his senior higher had left for him. It read: “Dear Dad. It is with great regret and sorrow that I’m writing you. I had to elope with my new girlfriend because I wanted to avoid a scene with Mom and you. I have been finding real passion with Stacy and she is so nice. But I knew you would not approve of her because of all her piercings, tattoos, tight motorcycle clothes and the fact that she is much older than I am. But it’s not only the passion...Dad she’s pregnant. Stacy says we will be very happy. She owns a trailer in the woods and has a stack of firewood for the whole winter. We share a dream of having many more children. Stacy has opened my eyes to the fact that marijuana doesn’t really hurt anyone. We’ll be growing it for ourselves and trading it with the other people who live nearby for cocaine and ecstasy. In the meantime we pray that science will find a cure for AIDS so Stacy can get better. She deserves it. Don’t worry Dad, I’m fifteen and I know how to take care of myself. Someday, I’m sure that we will be back to visit so that you can get to know your grandchildren. Love, your son John. P.S. Dad, none of the above is true. I’m over at Tommy’s house. I just wanted to remind you that there are worse things in life than the report card that’s in my center desk drawer. I love you. Call me when it’s safe to come home.”

Well, I think “John” might anticipate a call pretty quickly, but I’m not sure about the “safe, to come home” part. But it does put our worries about what we will eat or what we will wear in perspective doesn’t it? Jesus puts our worries in perspective by saying, “If

you must worry, worry about the kingdom of God—worry about doing God’s will and the lesser needs will fall into place.”

With the “perfect storm” of higher energy costs, devastating natural disasters, American grain diverted to bio-fuel, and “first world” greed and conspicuous consumption, there are many in the world today who must be worried about the very basics of food and shelter. It would be cruel to say to a person who is truly hungry that God provides for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, just not for you. And there were folks in Jesus’ day who were hungry, but that’s not the group to whom these words from Matthew’s gospel are addressed. Jesus fed those folks and taught them to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread”. Jesus never minimized hunger. In fact, one of the signs of the reign of God, which Jesus’ says is worth worrying about, is that the hungry are fed. Remember Mary’s song – the Magnificat? She envisions a day when people will say, “He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.”

But these words about not worrying, in the hands of Matthew, are directed to a church in conflict. The church was being persecuted by the larger community and there was internal conflict over the best way to respond to that persecution. One group went on the offensive; they went out as itinerant missionaries going from community to community proclaiming the good news and were totally dependant on the hospitality of others for the bare minimum necessities of food, clothing, and shelter for the night. They did not worry about where they would sleep the next night, or what they would eat the next day; it was enough to have food and shelter today. But, at the other end of the spectrum in this church conflict were those who were followers of Jesus in private but would not own their faith in public for fear that it would cost them, that persecution would mean a loss of their ample material goods. They were not the “starving” or the “tattered”. They were like us – plenty to eat and an outfit for every occasion. Yet, they were anxious about what might happen to their wealth tomorrow if they claimed Christ today. They didn’t dare trust God for the future!

And it is to these that Matthew’s Jesus says, “You can’t serve two masters. You can’t serve God and wealth. Which is it going to be?” But most of us have other worries than where our next meal is coming from. We worry about our loved ones, especially about their health. Senator Ted Kennedy’s experience this week reminds us of just how venerable we all are and so many of you know from your own personal experience with cancer something of what he and his family are going through right now. Wallace Stegner in his book of essays, Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs talks of growing up under the great sky of the west where a hawk would sweep down out of the blue to snatch a pullet from the chicken yard at any instant Stegner says that before he knew who he was, he knew what he was. He writes, “As sure as any pullet in the yard, I was a target, and I had better respect what had me it its sights.” Who among us has not had such a string of bad luck or ill health or devastating grief that we felt like the target of some demonic force that swept out of the blue to snatch happiness from us?! But if that is what we are, (a target) it’s not who we are, not ultimately at least. For we are the beloved children of a benevolent God who will not let us go! And the only way I know to live life to the fullest is this day is to trust tomorrow to that God’s hands.

I know from experience that that's easier said than done, but I am convinced that the longest faith journey for most of us is the journey from security to trust. From the security of things as they are to trust in that God who is making all things new! The continuity of our vital life is not after all permanence, but newness – the constant regeneration of the universe and us with it. Artists are people like you and me who paint a picture or write a poem, or love a person, or dream a dream about that newness that surges forth within us and sometimes overwhelms us. One such dreamer wrote: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth...I heard a loud voice proclaiming from the throne: ‘Now at last God has his dwelling among humans! He will dwell among them and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be an end to death and to mourning and crying and pain; for the old order has passed away!...Behold, I am making all things new!’”

“I –am-making-all-things-new” is a long name, but it is one of the Biblical names for God. I know that the poet, William Blake, is regarded as rather pagan by the orthodox, but I believe his poetry reflects the secret of living fully in the present and trusting God for the future. He writes: “He who binds to himself a joy does the winged life destroy; But he who kisses the joy as it flies lives in eternity’s sunrise.” Such marvelous images, for isn’t all meaningful life “winged life” – like a butterfly or a bird – you can’t hold on to it without destroying it? But to live fully in this day is to live in “eternity’s sunrise”. I believe, at it’s heart, our worry is a control issue. Even though the Christians to whom Matthew is writing had never gone hungry, they still felt the need to control things – to ensure that tomorrow and the next day were already arranged for. But we can’t control the future. “He who binds to himself a joy does the winged life destroy.” If we try to keep our children, our friends, our family life, our church as they are now, then one day we wake up to discover we’re hugging something that is lifeless. But she who lives fully in this day and trusts the future to God, “lives in eternity’s sunrise!”