

Stewardship Sermon Series
Treasure: Giving Without Worry

Texts: Psalm 121
Matthew 6:25-35

Preached: 11/23/14

I imagine Jesus as a great lover of the psalms. He seems to have known many of them by heart and their teaching informed his praying, preaching and his telling of parables. Psalm 121 clearly seems to be behind his Sermon on the Mount.

When worries threaten to poison your day, the psalmist demonstrates the antidote – he pauses with what he is doing, takes a deep breath and considers his resources. He has help available, he reminds himself. He is not alone. He lifts his eyes, in order to fix them on a power outside himself. He will fix his eyes on whom?



He will fix his eyes on God, creator of the world. He will assure himself that God is there for him, surely working on his behalf. If you don't take the time to pause, to consider, to quiet yourself, to turn your eyes from your current situation, to pray, then you can forget or miss or disregard God's presence. We may be effectively asleep...but God is not.

God cares about every step you take. Lean on God and he will not let you be swept away. God does not sleep on the job, rather he remains alert and involved.

Keep cool – the LORD will help.

Even when the sun is blazing, for you it will be like strolling under big oak trees. God is with you when it is bright and when it is pitch black. God is there when you wake and when you sleep. Even though evil seems to surround, there will be a holy shield around you. Your life might seem in jeopardy, but God guards your life, God guards you.



Baptism reminds us that before we can choose God, God has chosen us. God was there with us and for us in the beginning and will be there in the end. God is with us now and will always be there for us. When we head out (off to school, work, on some errand, to battle), God goes with us. And when we come back home, God is right behind us, ushering us into the door.

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When the Psalmist worried – he paused, lifting his eyes to the hills, rising above the immediate concern or dilemma, to consider his keeper, the shade on his right hand. When the Psalmist feared being swallowed by his anxiety, he called on God, and leaned on His promises.



But there is something plaguing our culture and we cannot help but be affected. It might even be called an epidemic. Although it begins as a psychological problem, it quickly becomes spiritual, and doctors know well it has very real physical ramifications. The epidemic is worry. We worry about many things, but we seem obsessed with money.

Scholar Donald Hinze has said,

America has a voracious appetite for material gain and goods and continues to devise ever-higher standards of living and to demand greater quantities of consumer goods. Greed, even on the small scale practiced by average Americans, generates enormous destructive powers. . . . Does anyone question that for First World people of privilege, that is, most Americans, the sacred mission has become the acquisition of money and accumulation of assets? Private profit is the goal more cherished than public good. The quest for money and possessions is as fervent, personal and private, as a religious endeavor.... Money and material things become the graven images of our idolatry.

We live in an age of anxiety, a time of many worries.

Researchers estimate that more than forty million people have been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder. But you don't have to have a diagnosis to be affected or even crippled by every-day worries.

We worry about our families, our finances, and our futures. We worry how those three things affect each other.

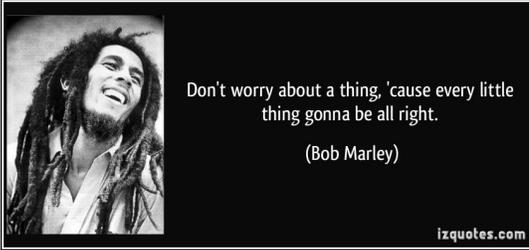


Of course, worry is not a new phenomenon.

It was the ancient Greeks who coined the term agoraphobia, which today we use to talk about a fear of public places. The Greeks, however, didn't have nearly the number, variety, and intensity of phobias from which we suffer today. We need relief. What will we do? Where will we turn?

As long as there has been music, we have had songs about worries and overcoming them. In fact, there is something about music itself that seems to help alleviate worry. Singing might be the best medicine. To stand and sing praise to God on a Sunday morning, doesn't only give glory to God, but lifts our own spirits.

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There have been silly little songs, not praise songs, just regular, every-day songs that address worry. You might think of Bob Marley's classic reggae tune "Three Little Birds," the chorus of which goes "*Don't Worry 'Bout a Thing, cause every little thing is gonna be alright...*"

Or, you might call to mind Bobby McFerrin's "Don't Worry, Be Happy." It's hard to deny that having someone sing to us is comforting. McFerrin begins:

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

Long before Marley and McFerrin, Jesus delivered his own don't worry song. On top of a hill, preaching to a crowd gathered around him, Jesus said, "Don't worry about your life, what you'll eat or what you'll drink, or about your body, what you'll wear. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothes?"

He sang about birds and lilies and said we were more important. Remember, Jesus was concerned about our hearts, which included our worries. Jesus knew that one of the things that can rob our hearts of joy and peace is an irrational fear surrounding things that we think we need. Listen to what Jesus included in his don't worry song.

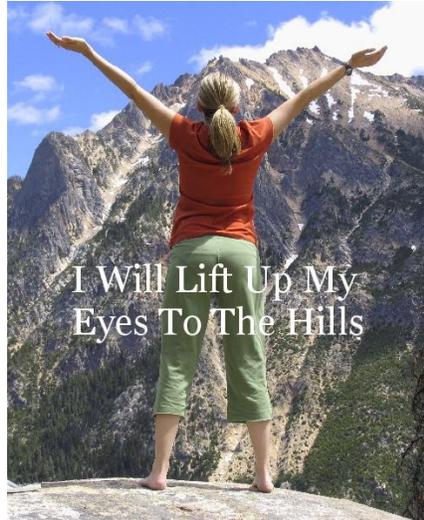
Jesus points us to beautiful things that we know God takes care of: birds and flowers. God made them and values them, just as God made us and values us. We are God's treasure. God takes care of God's creation. Does this mean we won't have challenges, conundrums, fears, troubles? Of course not. It does mean we are valuable to God, and God is concerned about our needs.

Just this week, I received an e-mail forward, which I rarely read, but for some reason I read this one:

If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it.
If He had a wallet, your photo would be in it.
He sends you flowers every spring.
He sends you a sunrise every morning
Face it, friend - He is crazy about you!

And God desires our well-being, so Jesus gives practical wisdom for our giving and living. He asks, "Who among you by worrying can add a single moment to your life?" What do we gain by worrying? We know that it gives us stress and anxiety and does damage to our bodies. Practically speaking, worry does not gain us anything.

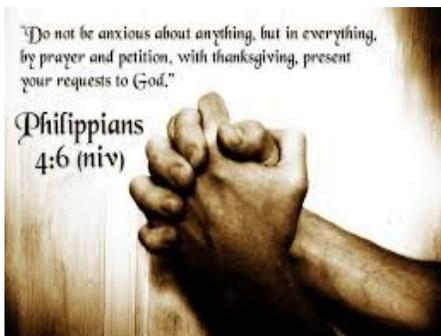
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Jesus, in effect, invites us to mimic the psalmist, to lift our eyes unto the hills, to consider God's care for us. Jesus invites us to take the energy and emotion we've been giving to worry and redirect them. If we can learn to do this, we can move forward in a healthy, productive way.

Instead of worrying, "What will I eat? What will I drink? What will I wear?" (you can add your own concerns, What will I do, Where will I go, How will I make ends meet...)

In place of focusing on these worries, Jesus directs us instead to "desire first and foremost God's kingdom and God's righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." It's about priority and focus. God wants to be our highest priority. Jesus directs us first to seek God, and everything else will fall into place. As we give our gifts to God, seek the things of God first, show our trust in practical and substantial ways -- God cares for us. Life is uncertain. Yet, always dreading what we will face next only increases our worry. But when we seek God, anticipate God's working, saving, loving priorities, there is less time for worry and it loses its power over us.



When Jesus speaks in the Sermon on the Mount about our treasure, he realizes that money is something people have always worried about. When we lift our eyes and fix them on God -- considering not just our own issues, but the purposes and priorities of God, our worries don't seem so overwhelming. As we put God first, in our giving and our living, we find that worry no longer cripples us, that anxiety cannot sap us of our spiritual energy.

We focus more on God working in us and through us. We see the world not out of our limited personal perspective, but through the lens of God's compassion and the blooming of God's Kingdom. And we trust more and more that God cares for us. When our treasure goes to the things of God, we understand more and more that we are God's treasure.