

No Worries?  
Matthew 6:25-34  
West Valley Presbyterian Church  
October 1, 2023

The first word in Matthew 6:25-34, today's Scripture passage, is "Therefore." If you see the word "therefore" in Scripture, you have to ask: What's it there for? What's the context of today's Scripture passage? Well, the context is what we talked about last month – the earlier part of Matthew 6. Just as a quick review: In Matthew 6, Jesus is in the middle of his Sermon on the Mount. And he talked about what our motives are when we do something "religious". Are we trying to show others how wonderful we are? Or are we trying to please God? And what's our top priority in life? Is it God? Do we want to live for God? Or do we want to live for financial security? If God is our top priority, then he is our security and we try to live for him. Living for God is what's best for us, and that's why Jesus tells us to do it.

So the context is, is God our top priority? That's the "Therefore" in today's passage. And before I read it, I'd like to ask you a question: Do you worry? I do; I worry about all kinds of things, as Rob will tell you. How about you? Do you worry? Here's what Jesus has to say about that, in Matthew 6:25-34.

<sup>25</sup> "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? <sup>27</sup> Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life<sup>[a]</sup>?"

<sup>28</sup> "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. <sup>29</sup> Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? <sup>31</sup> So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' <sup>32</sup> For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. <sup>33</sup> But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. <sup>34</sup> Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

Here ends the reading of God's Holy Word. Join me in saying Thanks be to God.

Is there anyone here among us who has never once worried about anything in their entire lives? Yeah, I'm not raising my hand either. I worry about plenty of things, which mostly don't need worrying about. So I am not going to stand up here and tell you to stop worrying, when I'm a worrier myself! But here's what we can do. We can acknowledge that we all worry, and we all need God's help to let go of worry - so that at least, worry doesn't rule our lives. And the best way to do that is to look closely at what Jesus says about worry, and then pray together for help in turning our worries over to God.

First thing Jesus says is, “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear.” OK, let’s look at that. We mostly don’t worry about whether we will have enough to eat, or clothes to wear. Our lives are a lot different now than they were 2000 years ago. There is such an abundance of food here in America that hardly any of us have to worry about it. We have plenty of food in our homes. And if we are running short of something, all we have to do is go to the grocery store, where we can choose between tens of thousands of different things to eat. And in my neighborhood, you can even buy produce from vendors sitting on the sidewalk. Food is abundant and cheap. We Americans typically spend about 10% of our income on food, and we have more of it than we can possibly eat. We may choose to grow our own vegetables or fruit as a hobby; but we certainly don’t have to.

But none of that was true in Jesus’ day! We know from Jesus’ parables that poor people sometimes did go hungry, and not because they were fasting! In Jesus’ day, most people were subsistence farmers or small fishermen, who sold what they could spare at the marketplace. If you were fortunate, you had wheat and some vegetables, and maybe a small fish or some figs or raisins to eat, and some watered-down wine to drink. All of which took hours of preparation. And it was expensive. If you were poor and lived in the city, you would probably spend nearly half your income for food. So, yes, it made sense in Jesus’ day to worry about where your next meal was coming from.

Clothing is another thing that we no longer worry very much about – except whether they are socially acceptable for the occasion. And unless they are designer originals, they aren’t very expensive. For example, if I decide that I want a nice black jacket for Sunday morning, I can easily go to the clothing store – or the thrift shop (which was in fact where I bought this jacket) - and get what I want for cheap. Any time I want.

But again, none of that was true in Jesus’ day. Ever wonder why nearly everybody back then wore what looked like a simple tunic, longer for women and shorter for men, with a belt around the waist? It was because of the tremendous amount of labor that went into making cloth. Nearly all cloth was produced by women, by hand, at home. They spun thread, from flax or wool; and it could take weeks to get enough thread to weave even a small piece of cloth. And once they had thread, weaving cloth could also take many weeks, since what they had to weave on was a small hand loom. Then you had to cut the cloth and sew it together by hand. Clothing back then was neither cheap nor easy to get. It was hard work over a long time. Most people had no more than two tunics, and an outer vest. So it made sense in Jesus’ day to worry about where your next tunic was coming from, when the one you had on wore out.

We mostly don’t worry about the specifics Jesus mentions: food, drink and clothing. But that doesn’t mean we should pat ourselves on the back. We shouldn’t say to ourselves, “Well, I don’t worry about food or clothes, so I’m doing good.” True, we probably don’t worry about those things. But we all worry about plenty of other things. For example, I personally worry far too much about relationships: “Is he mad at me for something?” Or scheduling: “I’ll never be able to get it all done.” Or health: “How many more years do I have before I get dementia?”

How about you? What do you worry about? Anyone? (Insurance coverage; health issues; paying off debt; safety of the people we love; crashing the car; being robbed or assaulted; caregiving responsibilities, etc)

And of course Jesus is quite right in saying that if we are worrying, then we're not trusting God. That's the point of what he says about the birds in the air, who don't sow or reap or store up crops, but our heavenly Father feeds them. As I'm sure you've noticed, once they're out of the nest, birds don't just sit around with their mouths open, waiting for someone to drop some food down their throats. Birds are hustlers. They are not just sitting around waiting for a handout. On the contrary, birds actively find and get whatever food is out there. They go about their business: they sleep, search for food, avoid predators, raise chicks. The next day they wake up and do it all again. They don't sit around and fret. They take advantage of everything God has provided for them. In their own way, they trust God.

So in the same way, says Jesus, don't worry. God knows what you need, better than you do; and because he loves you, he provides it for you. What you need is available. So don't stay awake fretting and worrying. Trust him, and sleep. Trust him, and go get what he has provided, when you need it.

OK. But how do we do that? How do we worry less and trust God more? Well, scolding ourselves probably won't work very well. It certainly doesn't work for me. If I say to myself, "Janet, stop worrying, you're not trusting God enough," then I just feel even worse. Because now I feel guilty in addition to worrying. How about you? Does it work for you? And the reason it doesn't work is because scolding myself doesn't get me out of my head. Here I am, spun up with worry inside myself; and if I now add scolding myself, and blaming myself for worrying, then it's even more all about me. Which doesn't solve the problem I'm worrying about – it just makes it worse.

Fortunately, Jesus knows us, far better than we know ourselves; and he has a solution which really will help us to stop worrying. His solution is this: "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." And as always, Jesus knows what he's talking about. If we seek God's kingdom and God's righteousness first, then what are we thinking about? God. And if we are thinking about God, then what are we NOT thinking about? Our worries. And if we're not thinking about our worries, then they don't take up as much space inside our souls. And THAT means that God has more space to do within us what he wants to do. And that usually means that the problem we've been worrying about, doesn't seem quite so bad. If we are worrying, then God is not our top priority. If God is our top priority, we can let go of worry.

So. Instead of worrying about today, or tomorrow, think about God. Talk to God. Ask him what his priorities are. Ask him what he wants you to be doing. Seek his will first of all. Seek first the kingdom of God. If we do, our priorities change. Our problems will seem a lot smaller, and our worries will no longer fill our minds. Let's try it. Let's pray.