

"What, Me Worry?"
Matthew 6:24-34
George Ronn
Cottage Grove United Church of Christ
Cottage Grove, Minnesota
Sunday, 27 February, 2011
Eighth Sunday after Epiphany

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus is addressing worry. This text is part of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus taught his followers in chapters 5, 6 & 7 of Matthew. In Chapter 5 Jesus begins with the Beatitudes, which in Latin simply means Blessings, but then he goes on to teach them many things including how to pray to the Lord.

In today's lesson he tells the followers then, and us today, that we should not worry about the "things" in life – what to eat or drink, what to wear. He reminds us that regardless of how much we worry, we cannot add even one single hour to our lives.

So, what are some of the things you worry about?

For me, the biggest worry is remaining gainfully employed. You see, along with all the normal bills in life, I need the medical benefits for Lynn, some of her prescriptions, even with the good benefit package we have at work are pretty expensive. I can imagine how much the insurance company pays.

With the economy being what it is; and the fact that SVU has laid-off over 800 employees in the Cities and an equal number in Boise in the past two years; and just recently they've announced another 350 layoffs are coming this year – I'm worried. I know I should have more faith that God is watching out for me; after all it was him that led me to my current position with SUPERVALU and to move to Minnesota 7 years ago. But I worry just the same.

Have you ever said, "I'm worried sick!" You know, there is medical evidence that indicates you're absolutely right. Worry *CAN* make you sick.

On the flip side of the coin, has anyone ever said to you "Don't worry about it!"

"That's easier said than done," you replied. And again... you are absolutely right. It *IS* hard to stop worrying. That's because worry is a habit and it's as addictive as chemical abuse. Worry is the emotional abuse of the self. It has absolutely no productive or positive qualities.

What are some of the things you worry about?

A.J. Cronin, the distinguished Scottish physician and author analyzed the worries of his patients this way:

Things which never happen - 40%

Things in the past which can't be changed by worry - 30%

Health worries - 12%

Miscellaneous petty worries - 10%

Real, legitimate worries and concerns - 8%

When you list your worries, how would you allocate the percentages?

The fact is most of our worries are over things that have taken place in the past and can never be changed by worry, or they are "What-ifs" about the future that most often never come to pass.

But worrying isn't something new is it. You have the disciples worrying about what people will think of them. You have the Samaritan woman at the well worried about what the people think when she tells them she met the Messiah. You have the Pharisees worried about their Earthly power. Example after example of worry is expressed. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, there is worry – and there is scripture telling us not to worry.

In 1st Peter 5 the Apostle says: Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.

In Romans 8 Paul tells us: If God is for us, who is against us? Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Do you see what Paul is saying? When a worry comes along, stop and think. None of the tremendous burdens Paul spoke of can defeat God's children. Most of us will never have to deal with the depth of difficulty Paul's constituents did. After all, many early Christians were being

martyred for their faith. When was the last time you had to escape from someone with a sword on your way to the supermarket or to work.

Paul is telling us that WE are the only thing that can separate us from the love of Christ, partly by worrying instead of trusting.

In today's Gospel, Jesus asks us if God takes care of the birds of the air and flowers of the field, will he not take care of us too?

Some people have interpreted this in a literal way and given away everything they own and live a life of poverty. Mother Teresa did this; and I think this is probably the greatest act of faith one can show on this earth. I'm not that far along my faith journey, my faith is not that strong.

So how do we stop ruining our lives with worry?

While researching this sermon, I came upon a story of an English businessman that told how he handled his worries. He has a Wednesday Worry Box. Whenever a worry comes along, he writes it down and puts it in the box. Each Wednesday, he takes them out one by one and eliminates the imagined worries that never came to pass. Norman Vincent Peale asked him what he did with the few remaining worries he had and the man replied, "I put them back into the box, tell the Lord I trust Him, and look at them again next Wednesday!"

The late Robert LeTourneau was a successful Christian industrialist and philanthropist from Vermont (his son is a state Senator in Vermont) who must have known the sixth chapter of Matthew quite well – he gave away 90% of his income to various charities and the church. He had this to say about worry: "Worry and trust cannot live in the same house. When worry is allowed to come in the door, trust walks out the other door; and worry stays until trust is invited in again, whereupon worry walks out."

This leaves us with a question. "Who is the honored guest in our house – worry or trust?"

All right, so how do we make sure trust is the honored guest in our house?

Well, I think most everyone has heard the "Serenity Prayer". It goes something like this: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference." If you don't know it, you should memorize it and then apply it every time a worry knocks at your door.

Instead of serenity, most of us worry over things we cannot change. God alone has the power to change things beyond our control. Remember this: Worry focuses on our *inability*, while trust focuses on God's *ability*.

When a worry comes along, stop and think through the serenity prayer. Then ask yourself:

- Is this a legitimate worry?
- Is it something I can honestly change?
- If not ask the Lord for peace of mind.
- If it is something that can honestly be changed, then ask the Lord for courage.

The wisdom part comes as we grow from worry to trust and from doubt to faith. The confidence we need is not really self-confidence as the world defines it, but "God confidence" which becomes the foundation of who we are as we move from worry to peace.