

## **DO NOT WORRY ABOUT YOUR LIFE** (Online Sermon)

Matthew 6:25-34 - June 7, 2020 - Immanuel UMC - Senior Pastor: Dr. Kelly McClendon

**I'm going to talk about worry today**, and don't worry I'm not going to start with a lame joke like I usually do. I'm just going to jump right in. So, how are you doing? Are you worried at all about our community, or nation, or our world in these strange days? I know some of you are at least a little worried. Like most people, I've lived through some anxious times, which I won't recount because I don't want to add to your worry, but in my memory this is one of the worst times. I know people who are losing their minds from their level of anxiety and worry. They're not just imagining things, we are facing real dangers and complicated problems in our world right now, and people are struggling to keep their head above the rising waters. If you look back in history, of course, there's been many worse times before, but in my opinion people don't seem to be handling the challenges as well as they did in ages past. But then, maybe our history books may have tried to accentuate the positive to just make it look that way.

**I don't know**, but I think part of it is that the internet and social media are making it easier to constantly throw gas on any fires of anxiety and people struggle to calm down long enough to think straight and to get their feelings in check. We run off on wild tangents of outrage based on flimsy evidence and assume the worst about everyone and everything. We're also losing faith in our leaders and information outlets or living in echo chambers that keep blinders on us.

**Still, I can't deny** that these are truly challenging and hard times, as they say, "*it is what it is.*" We still have the "normal" fears about environmental issues, or health issues, or family hardships, or work related problems, or our economy, or political issues, and so on. If all that was not enough we've also been facing a world-wide pandemic virus and fears of it and about the long-term consequence of how we've responded to it. Two weeks ago, I was praying for some relief because this pandemic is taking our nation to a breaking point, and then on top of that we've been facing new tragic examples of racial injustice. Of course, for some people that's been their painful experience most every day, and I can't fully imagine how hard that must be from their point of view, but I feel concerned about it even more deeply now. On top of that we now see the associated social unrest that includes peaceful protests, about things that break our hearts, to violent riots that make us confused, angry, and afraid. I long for the days of six months ago when my biggest worry was a probable split in our denomination and how that might impact our church family. That hasn't gone away, but it's on the back burner for now and it doesn't seem all that important. All of those are debatable points - but my general point is this - a consequence of all this, is that we're facing a **pandemic outbreak of worry**. For so many people, there is a heaviness and weight of anxiety that can be crippling.

**Have you seen see those funny** collections of church signs when some silly mistake is on the sign, to the embarrassment of the church and the enjoyment of others? I saw one that said, "*Don't let worry kill you - let the church help!*" **I'm not sure that meant what they thought.**

**I want to try to help you cope with the problem of worry a little bit better today.**

**As I was thinking** about that idea I remembered a song that was a fad several years ago. You know how certain songs can spread like wildfire - for example how many of you know the tune to the Macarena? How about the Macarena dance? Can you do that? If you can then for once I'm glad I can't see you right now. Just keep that to yourself. I am glad that fad has passed.

**Many years ago**, in 1988, a little song captured the attention of millions of people. It was #1 on the charts winning several grammy awards. It was performed by the a capella jazz great Bobby McFerrin. It offered a solution to the ups and downs and setbacks of life - "*Don't Worry - Be Happy.*" Do you remember? If not, look it up, and get that song stuck in your head.

*Here's a little song I wrote, you might want to sing it note for note. Don't worry, be happy.*

*Cause when you worry your face will frown and that will bring everybody down, so don't worry, be happy.... Don't worry be happy now..."*

**For awhile that song was inescapable.** It was played endlessly on radio, television, in malls, in elevators - the saying showed up on t-shirts and lunch-boxes and buttons and bumper stickers. Don't worry - be happy. But eventually, I became sick of it, not just because of the repetition but because of how naive and unrealistic it was. I admit, when I first heard the song, for a moment I was happy. It was a fun and harmless diversion. But then the song would end and news would come on telling me about all the suffering and evils in the world that make it real hard to be happy sometimes - if you care about other people at all. Eventually, whenever I heard the phrase "*Don't worry - be happy*" I thought to myself, "*Yeah right, that's easier said than done.*" This song didn't even say how not to worry, it just said, don't worry. Telling a worried person, "*just don't worry*" is like telling a person with a really bad cold, "*just don't sneeze.*" It just doesn't work. The Lion King song, "*Hakuna Matata!*" is similar. It just doesn't work. Bob Marley's classic song, "*Don't worry about a thing,*" is the best song of the bunch but it doesn't really work either.

**Worry** - it is something we all struggle with sometimes. I struggle with it too.

**Our English word "WORRY"** evolved from the German word "Wurgen" which literally means "to choke" or to "strangle." Not a very pretty picture is it, as we have been reminded of in recent days. So the word "worry" has evolved into a term which literally describes a form of mental, emotional, and spiritual strangulation and it is surely deadly to both body and soul.

**Please understand that worry is different from concern.** Concern is caring that results in appropriate action. Concern can be a good thing, and an appropriate expression of love. For example, being concerned when a loved one is very late returning home - concerned enough to go out and look for them and then bring them safely in. Or it's like being concerned about being unemployed - concerned enough to go out and look for a job with all your might.

**Or it's like being concerned about pandemic possibilities** - so that you take whatever precautions seem like the best practices at the time out of love for others around you.

**It is also like being concerned about racial injustice** so that you own that you may be a part of the problem, or so that you listen more to people whose experience is different from yours, and so that you repent and seek to make amends as much as you are able. Real concern sees the reality of challenge - but it motivates people to look for possible solutions and to work toward positive change with great passion. Concern can be heavy too, but it can be helpful.

**Worry on the other hand is that strangling activity** which keeps thoughts whirling about endlessly in our mind without ever resulting in action because you're stuck in it. It's like racing a car engine without letting out the clutch or putting it into gear - you make a lot of noise but you don't move. At best worry is a waste of time and energy, at it's worse it can destroy your life and devolve into a kind of bitter hopelessness.

**I came across the following thought-provoking descriptions of worry:**

- Worry is a denial of faith.
- A day of worry is more exhausting than a week of work.
- Worrying gives small things big shadows.
- Worry is the advance interest you pay on troubles that may never actually come.
- Life lived in worry invites death in a hurry.
- Worry is a thin stream of fear trickling through the mind. If left to run uncontrolled, it will cut a channel into which all other thoughts will drain.
- Worry is like a rocking chair, it gives you something to do, but it won't get you anywhere.
- Worry is like trying to walk in quicksand. It paralyzes and absorbs a person.

**Our reading from the gospel** of Matthew records a time when Jesus touched on the universal human disease of worrying. Jesus says, *"Do not worry about your life."*

**With all due respect to Jesus, at first glance, that seems just as superficial and naive** as the one-time craze song, *"Don't Worry - be happy."* But if you read on - Jesus goes on to point us toward a remedy for the universal human disease of worry. And what Jesus teaches is not a passing fad, a here today gone tomorrow diversion. No - Jesus provides us with directions that have been proven trustworthy in life after life for more than two thousand years.

**FIRST, Jesus asks us to trust that God will provide for our needs.** Jesus tells us that God knows us and loves us. God knows what we need, and God has infinite concern for each of His children. Jesus tells us that God gave us life, and if God gave us the gift of life itself then surely we can trust him to give us the things that are necessary to sustain life.

**I believe that God won't do for us what He knows we can, and ought to do for ourselves.** He will give us the seed and the sunshine and the rain and the good earth and the miracle of growth (which are all examples of grace from God) but then God expects us to plow the ground and plant the seed and tend to the crops until they become food on our tables.

**But all our work would be for nothing** - except for the fact that God continues to be gracious and generous to us. Trust God. The Bible says God has a good future planned for His world and His children. It is the plan of God to "provide" for His children in this life and the next.

**The truth is we cannot simply resolve, "I will not worry."** We cannot pitch worry and leave a vacuum in our minds because worry will just rush right back in. What we must do is replace worry with something else. We must replace it with trust, which is another word for faith.

**Jesus said, "Let not your heart be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me."** (John 14). The word we translate as "troubled" in that passage literally means to be torn apart, to be divided. Jesus is saying that we must put our hearts and minds in one place - trust in God.

**I remember when our children first went off to preschool.** I remember being amazed that they weren't very worried about it (we had the usual separation anxiety, but only for a couple of days). When they went to school, they didn't worry all day about whether someone would come to pick them up, or whether their house would still be there when they got home, or whether they would have food to eat at home. They didn't worry about such things because they completely trusted that their parents were able and willing to provide for their needs - and thanks be to God who helped us with all of that.

**In much the same way,** we Christians should trust that our heavenly Father is able and willing to supply all that we most need in life. That is part of the cure for worry - to replace it with faith that we have a heavenly parent who loves us and who will provide for our needs.

**I've always liked this little poem, I don't know the author, but it says,**

*Said the Robin to the Sparrow: "There is one thing I would really like to know,"*

*why these anxious human beings - Rush about and worry so."*

*Said the Sparrow to the Robin: "Friend, I think that it must be*

*That they have no heavenly Father - Such as cares for you and me."*

**Like the birds** of the air and the lilies of the field we live in dependence on the gifts of God.

**The great author, Victor Hugo also said,**

*"Have courage for the great challenges of life and patience for the small ones. And when you have finished your daily task, go to sleep in peace. God is still awake."*

**SECOND, we must focus our life - first - on the Kingdom of God.** Everything hinges upon keeping this "FIRST" thing first. Nothing in our lives can come before submitting to the sovereignty / the rule of God in every area of our lives.

**Nothing else in life can be at the center** - not people or things, nor causes or desires - nothing. When we make the rule of God in our lives the focal point, then everything else is put in its proper perspective. What does it mean to put God and His kingdom first?

**Here is a clue...** I saw a "Ziggy" cartoon in the newspaper. The little character says, *"My philosophy is to leave your worries on the doorstep and hope somebody will swipe them."* From a certain point of view that is not a bad idea.

**How can we seek first the Kingdom?** One way is by leaving all our worries, and our doubt and weakness and misplaced loyalties, at the doorstep of God's Kingdom. When we cast all our cares upon God it is an act of trust that recognizes that God has power over all things great and small. To seek first the Kingdom is in effect to realize - God is in control, and we are not.

**Alistair Maclean quotes a story from a German mystic named Tauler.** One day Tauler met a man living in apparent poverty. *"God give you a good day, my friend,"* he said. The poor man answered, *"I thank God I never had a bad one."* Then Tauler said, *"God give you a happy life, my friend."* *"I thank God,"* said the poor man, *"I am never unhappy."* Tauler in amazement asked, *"What do you mean?"* *"Well,"* said the poor man, *"when it is fine I thank God; when it rains I thank God; when I have plenty, I thank God; when I am hungry, I thank God; and since God's will is my will, and whatever pleases Him pleases me, why should I say I am unhappy when I am not."* Tauler looked at the man in astonishment. *"Who are you?"* He asked. *"I am a prince,"* he said. *"In what Kingdom are you a prince?"* asked Tauler. The poor man answered quietly but confidently, *"I am a prince in the Kingdom of God..."* How is that possible? Because our Father is the King of heaven and of earth.

**I said this just a couple of weeks ago but it still rings true to me** - if God is our treasure - we can never be poor or go bankrupt! If God's Kingdom is our highest priority and if we've given control of our lives and our church to God - then ultimately, when all is said in done, in this life or the next - there is no possibility of defeat, or failure, or disappointment. For the plans of men and women may fail - but the will and purpose of God are guaranteed to triumph.

**Victor Hugo also wrote this little poem** about trusting in God and the power He gives to us,

*Let us learn like a bird - for a moment to take - sweet rest on a branch -  
that is ready to break; She feels the branch tremble, yet happily she sings.  
What is it to her? She has wings, she has wings.*

**We are not seeking first to make a living** (that's important and necessary) but first we are seeking to have a life in God's kingdom. God's Kingdom is something we can begin to enjoy here and now - but this is not all there is - there is more. The Kingdom of God is our home, whether we experience it or hereafter, or both, the Kingdom of God will stand forever.

**I don't know about you** but I'm disgusted by what I hear and see coming out of our political leaders most days, and for me personally one side is as bad as the other or at least they trade back and forth every other day. If I was trusting in them to lead us out of the mess we're in, and solve the problems of our society, then I might have a good reason to worry, but I'm not.

**I pray for those leaders**, they have an important role to play and we need them to do better. However, my primary identity is that I am a citizen of the Kingdom of God - and my leader, my King, my savior and Lord is willing and able to make a real difference in the lives of all who trust in Him and obey Him. I'm also not just waiting for His Kingdom to be my home in heaven. I'm striving to live in that Kingdom even now and to serve as its ambassador.

**Jesus said, "Seek first the Kingdom of God."** Make it your goal for your will to match God's will. Make it your highest aspiration for your hopes and dreams and desires and values and attitudes and actions to be Christ-like, and then know that God's will triumphs in the end.

**THIRD, Jesus tells us to live one day at a time.** Specifically he tells us *"do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today."*

**I've heard it said that** *"The present is the only currency we have to spend."* The past is past. It cannot be undone or spent differently. I think we need to look back to get perspective on the present, but we can't live in the past or change it. The future is out of reach. It is right that we are concerned for the future, but by definition the future is always coming "tomorrow" and "tomorrow" never comes - for when the sun rises it is never tomorrow but always today. We can only move toward the future by making the most of today. When we worry it is usually because we are spending our time looking over our shoulder terrified that something might be gaining us and so we trip over today. Or we drag some regret from the past along like a ball and chain. Or we are anxious about all the things we imagine might happen in our future. In other words, we drag painful stuff from the past, or we borrow anxieties from an uncertain future - and when we are carrying that load then we have no strength left to deal with today.

**You know that old 12-Step saying - "One day at a time?"** They got that from Jesus! Jesus reminds us that anyone can bear a burden for just one day. We must remember that each day is a gift from God that we must thankfully receive and use to its fullest. A friend of mine, who is a recovering alcoholic, gave me this little illustration about living one day at a time. It says...

*Imagine that you had a bank that credited your account each morning with \$86,400 dollars. This account could carry no balance over into the next day and no cash could be held for the future. At the end of each day the account automatically cancelled whatever amount was left unspent. What would you do with such an account? You would spend it fully each day!! The truth is this - while we live - we all have such an account given as a gift from God. The name of this account is called "time" or "today." Each day we receive into our account a credit of 86,400 seconds of time. At the end of each day there is no balance left. We cannot borrow from yesterday and no time carries over into tomorrow. We can never "save time" for whatever is unspent as the end of the day is cancelled. What should we do with such an account? We should spend it fully each and every day!*

**If you focus on what you can do**, what you can change, what small steps you can take today, then you will get unstuck from worry and more up to a more productive kind of concern. You can't do everything, or solve every problem, but you can do something one day at a time.

**I remember visiting a mother in the hospital fighting cancer.** Her husband and child found a "*Family Circus*" cartoon and brought it to her for encouragement and posted it in the room. In the cartoon the older sister Dolly is speaking to her younger brother Jeffy and she says,

**"Yesterday is the past, tomorrow is the future, but today is a gift.**

**That's why it's called the *present*."** Simple, but full of truth.

**What are you going to do with the gift each day represents?** Better, what you are going to do today, that is positive and productive, and that celebrates the good and contributes to that good for yourself and others? Some days are better (enjoy them), while others days are worse, but if you walk hand in hand with Jesus, and face them one day at a time, you can keep going.

**According to Jesus, part of the cure for worry,** is to live in the present, one day at a time.

**Jesus said, "*Do not worry about your life.*"** I suspect that I am not the only person here today who struggles with worry and anxiety - am I? The gospel of Matthew records a time when Jesus touched on the universal human disease of worrying. In the Gospel of Matthew, in the 25<sup>th</sup> verse of chapter six, Jesus says, "***Do not worry about your life.***" It sounds, at first glance, just as superficial and naive as the one-time craze song "*Don't Worry - be happy.*" But then Jesus goes on to point us toward a remedy for the universal human disease of worry.

**1. TRUST THAT GOD WILL PROVIDE FOR YOUR NEEDS**

*(Either here or hereafter - and most of the time it will both)*

**2. FOCUS FIRST - ON THE KINGDOM OF GOD (and its righteousness).**

**3. LIVE ONE DAY AT A TIME (staying close to Christ and walking by faith)**