



**8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany**  
**“What Are You Worried About?”**  
**February 27, 2011**  
**Matthew 6:24-34**

*Prayer: Bless this word proclaimed, and we who hear it, O Lord,  
that in the midst of our worries and fears, we may find peace in you. Amen.*

Every now and then, I encounter a sleepless night where the concerns of my mind prevent me from falling asleep. One Saturday night especially, I had great difficulty sleeping. One concern on my mind that night was trivial – yet important – what if the alarm did not go off on Sunday morning to wake me up? What if I overslept and was late for church? As I began to write out the concerns on my mind, I also wrote, “God, it’s a Saturday night and I can’t sleep. Did you not get the memo that a sleepless night as *not* to happen on a Saturday night?”

Worry is something that each of us have done at some point or other in our lives. We may not intend to worry, but things come up that go ‘bump’ in the night; things that leave us wondering. If we worry too much, we may make ourselves sick to our stomachs, or excessively wring our hands. Neither of which are healthy reactions.

Several years ago, Bobby McFerrin wrote a song entitled, “Don’t Worry, Be Happy.” It’s a simple song that depicts an image of a warm, tropical island. It is also a simple song with a message of not to worry.

In different language, Jesus tells us the same thing in today’s Gospel: do not worry. As we look at the events of the world around us, we may also look at the Gospel today and wonder whether or not God is in touch with the world – certainly there is plenty of news that can cause us to worry: the economy, tensions in the Middle East and the impact on gas prices, affordable health care, the success of our children/grandchildren in school, whether or not our children/grandchildren will have faith, worries about relationships, whether or not the apple dumpling bake will be successful, the weather on our drive to and from work, perhaps even what the weather will be like when we go on vacation!

The beauty of the things we worry about is most of the time, the worries are about things we cannot control! When we worry, we are a lot like a car stuck in a snow bank when we try to control these things. We spin our wheels, going nowhere quickly. Sometimes, the more we spin our wheels, the greater the likelihood is of our becoming stuck.

Two of our members in recent days have shared with me another definition of worry: worry is like a rocking chair – it gives you something to do, but doesn’t get you anywhere. Worry can indeed be like that!

Matthew's Gospel today does not begin with a statement about not worrying. Rather, our reading begins with a sentence that catches us off guard. "No one can serve two masters, for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

This is a sentence that on one level, we may think "that makes sense" when we hear it. After all, it is indeed difficult to serve two masters at the same time. Time, loyalty, and attention are divided between the two. Rather than giving of one's self equally and willingly, the servant may find him or her self going over, above, and beyond the call of duty for one, but doing minimal work for the other.

"But Pastor," you might be thinking, "the days of slavery and having servants are over. What is all this talk about slaves or servants having two masters?"

Here is what I mean – the reality that our time and our energies – whether we like it or not can be divided. For example, we may want to spend more time with our families, only to be required to spend more time at our jobs. We may think God to be calling us into something new, only to have to place our dreams on hold due to an unexpected and perhaps critical situation. We may spend all our waking hours on facebook or twitter that we neglect the family and friends closest to us in everyday life.

Yes, we are divided – even among ourselves -- divided and filled with distractions that lead us to worry, to not be able to give our full attention to anything, let alone to God.

And God knows that – and reminds us – *repeatedly*—not to worry. We are not to worry about whether or not there will be enough in the checkbook to pay this month's bills or to meet the monthly budget. We are not to worry about what clothes we will wear. Nor are we to worry about whether or not God really loves us.

Our lessons today carry this message loud and clear that we are to trust, relax, and rely on God's promises. We are to trust that God's mercy, God's grace, is sufficient for each and every one of us. We are to trust that the God who took care of the Israelites in the wilderness – even though they complained – will be the same God who cares for us. We are to trust that the God who made the birds that have been chirping with snow on the ground, is the God who made the spring flowers begin to peek out of the ground is the same God who does indeed provide for our every need. We are to trust that the God who loves us so much sent Jesus to die on the cross in order that we might have eternal life with Him is also the same God who provides for the needs of all creation.

God provides for these needs not out of scarcity, not out of fear that something will happen to God's creation. Instead, God provides out of **ABUNDANCE** for all of creation – including you and me.

In our weekly gathering, we are reminded of God's abundance as we gather around the Table to be nourished and fed in God's abundance and generosity. "*We come, to the hungry feast, hungry for a world of peace, to hungry hearts unsatisfied, the love of God is not denied. We come, we come to the hungry feast.*" (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship, #479; @2006 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.*)

We are fed, in order that we might go out into the world to share this abundance with others – with others who worry about not having enough and with others who need a reminder of having abundance in their lives.

Worry is based out of a fear of not having enough. Worry can rob us of joy and delight in daily living. Sometimes when we worry, our hearts may be weighed down. We may keep our eyes close to the ground because we do not want to make eye contact with others. We may find we may not want to share our worries with others, because, ‘we would not want to bother anyone.’

I suspect the Psalmist may have had a mind full of worries. One of the translations I came across had “my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised to high” instead of “I am not filled with proud thoughts”. Psalm 131 is one of several songs of ascent – songs that were sung as people travelled up to Jerusalem. If you have ever hiked a path that has gone uphill, there is tension between keeping the eyes forward on what is ahead, and watching the ground in order to avoid rocks, or holes, or tree roots. This is a task that can be difficult to do keep our eyes on both at the same time!

Yet the Psalmist does not stay in their worry so that neither their heart nor their eyes are lifted up. Rather, the Psalmist finds peace, trust, ‘like a child that is quieted.’

There is a striking contrast between the words of today’s Psalm and our Communion liturgy. In order to show this contrast, I need your help in the following dialog:

“The Lord be with you.” (**“And also with you.”**)

“Lift up your hearts.” (**“We lift them up to the Lord our God.”**)

“Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. (**“It is right to give him thanks and praise.”**)

Did you hear that? The invitation to lift up our hearts to the Lord our God. The invitation to rest in the comfort and mercy of God’s love – like a child who has been comforted and quiet by a parent. The invitation to join in the prayer and praise of God’s abundance – even in the midst of our worries and our fears. The invitation to trust that God’s abundance is plenty.

In that abundance, we need a reminder that God’s mercy and grace are indeed sufficient for the day. Tomorrow, the next day, and the next day after that will bring worries of their own. God’s grace and abundance are new every day.

Sometimes, we forget God’s abundance in our lives. This week, I am again asking for your help. I want you to find pictures and images where you see abundance, courage, and trust in action. Over the past few weeks, we have heard and reflected on how we are to live in love with God and with one another –a task that can be easier said than done because of our human sinfulness.

Our human sinfulness and worry can prevent us from seeing God’s abundance in our lives. We need the reminder that abundance, courage, and trust still do exist. The pictures that I am asking for can be pictures you have taken, or pictures or images downloaded from the computer, from the newspaper, or your favorite magazine(s).

Bring the pictures in, and we’ll look at them! Not only will we look at them, but we will talk about them. We will keep them up as we move into Lent to remind us of God’s lavish yet costly grace within each of our lives.

May God continue to grant us the strength to trust in God’s amazing abundance that provides for our every need! Amen.