

## SERMON CCI Luke 12: 22- 34 What? Me Worry?

Jesus' words, "Don't worry," sound so nice. **SLIDE** They remind me of Bobby McFerrin's old song, "Don't worry, be happy." But is it realistic not to worry in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? In a time when an escalating trade war with China can send the value of our retirement accounts plunging with the stock market? When companies are considering whether they will have to lay employees off? When people have very real concerns about whether they will outlive their income? Or be forced to move from their home because they need more health care? Jesus, doesn't worry serve a useful function... sometimes?

In today's scripture reading Jesus spoke to a crowd of his disciples and followers sitting on a hilltop on a warm spring day as Jesus walked among them teaching and answering questions. The wild flowers that covered the hills were in full bloom. Birds were flying overhead hoping to find some discarded bread or fish to eat. These were not wealthy people listening to Jesus. His 12 disciples had left their jobs to follow him around the country. They had no income and depended on the hospitality of others for their next meal and places to sleep. They had no suitcases packed with extra clothes. And the crowds- they were filled with people who worked all their lives just to put food on the table and clothes on their families' backs. They had no reserves. All it took was a serious injury or illness or an unscrupulous boss or a raise in taxes and their small income was gone. And yet Jesus said to them, "Don't worry about your life." The word for worry means to have a brooding, fearful concern about things, to let your mind be bound up by concerns. There were plenty of very real concerns, and Jesus said, "Don't worry?"

**SLIDE** Jesus looked up and waved his hand toward some crows overhead, "Look at the crows, God cares for their needs without them having to worry or work themselves into a frenzy." Crows were one of the animals that the Jewish law considered unclean and they were not to be eaten because as scavengers, they could carry disease. Crows weren't appreciated like the sparrows and swallows we read about in Psalm 84 **SLIDE**

"Even the sparrow has found a home,  
and the swallow a nest for herself,  
where she may have her young—  
a place near your altar,

Lord Almighty, my King and my God."

And we think, "Ahhh, how sweet." **SLIDE** But we never call crows sweet. They're pests when you eat outside in a park, and noisy enough to scare away the other

birds we do enjoy. Yet Jesus used them to say, “If God even provides for **this unclean** bird, won’t he provide for your needs as his children? Aren’t you worth more than a crow?” And the answer is, “Of course we are.” And yet, we worry.

**SLIDE** Then Jesus waved his hands toward the wild flowers growing on the hills around them, calling the people to notice their stunning beauty. Jesus says God’s flowers on the hillsides are better dressed than King Solomon ever was as one of the wealthiest men alive. If God clothes the wild flowers even though they are short-lived and will soon die in the summer sun, will he not provide clothes for us as his children who will one day live forever? And the answer is, “Of course God will.” And yet, we worry.

Most of us in this country are not worrying about our next meal or going without clothing. When we’re struggling, we have food banks and free breakfasts and lunches at school for food and thrift stores for clothes. Americans are some of the richest people in the world. And yet, we still have our worries. Will we live long enough to take care of our spouse with Alzheimers or cancer, who will take care of our adult child with autism after we’re gone? What if we outlive our money? What then? What if we can’t afford to fix the roof or repair the fence or car? What if I get cancer and can’t take care of my young children? What if I never find a person to marry? What if I lose my job? What about all the problems in our nation and the world? And we worry.

**SLIDE** To us too, Jesus asks. “Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?” And the answer is, “Of course not.” And Jesus asks if we can’t even do that small thing, why do we worry about the other stuff of life? Now, myself, I don’t think the ability to add an hour to my life is a small thing to do; I can’t do it. Can you? Imagine being among your family totally enjoying laughing and eating around the table together. What if we could stop time and insert an extra hour for the family to enjoy together? Don’t we sometimes wish we had just one more hour to spend with someone near death? An extra hour to tell them how much we love them, an extra hour to treasure as a memory after they’re gone? Or just one extra hour to finally catch up on our to-do list?

But we can’t. Only God can. Jesus is being very clear: worrying doesn’t work! No one by worrying ever kept something they were afraid will happen from happening. No one by worrying ever changed the course of a human life, of an illness, or any other situation. No one ever grew in faith by worrying either. In fact, faith and worrying cannot co-exist. We cannot live by faith and worry at the same time.

**SLIDE** So why do we worry? Vs 30 tells us “For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them.” It makes sense for people with no relationship with God as their loving Father to spend their lives running after basic things because there is no one to count on besides themselves. And when life gets tough, what else is left but to work harder or worry? But for those of us who do know God as our loving Father, we **know** the character of God—that God is loving and capable and committed to providing for his people. We don’t need to try to convince him to act by our fervent prayers. He already knows what we need before we ask. Like a loving father, he’s already got it taken care of. We’re like the young toddler I watched at the park yesterday with her hand in her grandpa’s hand walking without any worries. She wasn’t worried about what she would eat or wear, or even whether she might fall. Without worry, she could truly enjoy the moment. How many moments of joy are we missing because we choose to worry instead of trusting our heavenly Father and walking hand in hand?

**SLIDE** Vs 31 tells us the secret to not worrying. “Seek first the kingdom of God and these things will be given you as well.” The kingdom of God is a realm of life that is present wherever and whenever God is at work and where God’s will is done. It’s not a place, it is a reality that connects heaven and earth. We hear it in the Lord’s Prayer- Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Every time we choose to do God’s will, God’s kingdom is present on earth. Every time someone commits their life to Christ, heaven touches earth. Each time we love our neighbor as ourselves, heaven is seen on earth. Seeking the kingdom means seeking what God wants, what’s important to God, what God cares about. Making ourselves available to God, to be a part of what God is doing on earth, doing our best to respond to life the way Jesus would if he were here.

**SLIDE** When I was an assistant manager at Mary Bridge Children’s Hospital I read an article about assistant management that I’ve never forgotten. The author wrote about the importance of understanding your boss’ ways of thinking and learning from how he/she responds to situations so that in their absence, they can trust you to carry on. I think that’s what seeking first the kingdom of God is like. We spend time learning from God’s Word how Jesus thinks and learning from how he responded to situations, and then we do our best to follow in his footsteps in his absence. Making that our life’s first priority. And when we do, all that we need in this life is there. Not because we worried enough or worked ourselves into a frenzy, or prayed hard enough, but because we have our priorities right. The kingdom first and everything else as gift from our loving Father. Because if we get

it backwards, if we put having our wants and needs met first, we'll waste our lives worrying at every sign of trouble. And we'll miss the most important thing in this life, the very thing that will bring us the peace and security we long for. Jesus says, **SLIDE** "Seek first the kingdom of God, be about what God cares about, and all the rest will fall in line." We can trust it.

The same is true for churches too. Churches can get their priorities mixed up. They can put their focus on what meets their members' needs first. Churches do it all the time, especially in times of decline. "Well, we're the ones who are here, so surely our needs and wants come first. If someone wants to join us, great! But don't expect us to go looking for them, or change for them..." And then they wonder why people aren't interested in the church anymore, there's not much life or joy in the church, younger people won't stay, and visitors don't come back.

What's number 1 around here? We don't see it in what we say as much as in what we do. What does what we do say is #1 around here? What might change if seeking the kingdom of God and what God cares about was #1? And what does God care about? Going and making disciples. How would you spend your time, energy, and money differently? What would become more important if making and building up disciples was your #1 priority? What changes are you willing to make so new people can find a place in God's kingdom here? And perhaps the more fundamental question is: Will you trust that as you make changes, God will meet all your own needs too? Isn't that what churches fear? That if we change, we'll lose what's important to us?

Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and everything you need will be given to you." We serve an awesome God who knows what we need and whose storehouse is never empty. Can we say with confidence, His eye is on the sparrow, (or the crow) and I know he watches me?