

Sunday – February 27, 2011
Pastor - Rev. Walter W. Westbrook
Sermon – **Don't Worry? Fat Chance**

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Matthew 6:24-34

How many of us find it almost impossible not to worry? Parents worry about children. Adult children worry about parents. Husbands and wives worry about each other, especially when they are apart. Students worry about tests. Teachers worry about students. All kinds of people worry about the economy or crime or war. Some people struggle from paycheck to paycheck, while others fret over investments. And how are all these protests in the Arab world going to affect us? And don't most of us know someone who is in harm's way overseas?

There is so much to worry about. But, Jesus tells his disciples *not* to worry. And he begins this brief lesson talking about money.

V. 24 - Jesus is pretty clear here. We can serve God, or we can serve money (and all that having money represents: property, power, respectability, freedom to travel, all kinds of things).

Too often, we try to have it both ways. We want God to love us and protect us, and fix what's wrong and give us what we want. But, we also want wealth, so we don't always have to be turning to God for every little thing. It is almost as if we have two altars in our hearts: one to God, and one to worldly wealth. And we go to whichever one we feel we need most at that moment. We stumble from one to the other and back again in some sort of clumsy dance. We don't want to have to choose whom to serve. We want it all.

But, money is not inherently evil. It's a tool, an instrument, something to be used, but not something to be worshipped. Often misquoted, we find in **I Timothy 6:1**, "The *love* of money is the root of all kinds of evil." The evil comes not from the money itself, but from our relationship with money. The proper relationship for a Christian is to use money to further the Kingdom of God, not to make the accumulation of money a priority for its own sake, no matter what excuse we make for chasing affluence.

So, Jesus moves along from this warning about money (*everything* Jesus says about money is a warning) to warning us about worrying. The word “worry” in some form appears in verses 25, 27, 28, 31, and twice in 34. Listen for them: **(Mt 6:25-34)**

See how Jesus sets up contrasting world-views. One world-view is the common one, in which God has very little to do. That view would worry about what to eat and what to wear, about how long we’ll live, all of which are things that “the Gentiles” worry about, and strive for. There is nothing wrong with Gentiles, but in Jesus’ day, these would have been mainly pagans, worshippers of Roman gods. With no knowledge of his Father, it would have made sense to run after material things. They didn’t know any better.

But, Jesus is talking to his disciples. They *should* know better. He has been trying to teach them for a while at this point. He was also setting an example for them to follow. He had no job. He had no home. And yet, people took care of him *and* his disciples. Wasn’t that God at work?

Somehow, birds find food and make homes. Somehow, the lilies of the field are beautiful, even though they don’t work for it, and are not long for this world. They are more glorious than the legendary King Solomon, even though they will soon be thrown into the oven for fuel.

Why would God do that? Think of how beautiful so many things are - things God created out of a sense of generosity, out of a sense of abundance. Think of fields of wildflowers. Think of trees that change color every fall. Think of snow-capped mountains. Think of all the animals and plants in jungles that almost nobody ever gets to see. Think of all the animals and plants at the bottom of the ocean that nobody has ever gotten to see. Why would God pay attention to things you or I would never, ever see? Things that are useless to us?

“Consider the lilies of the field.” There are 115 species of lily. And 3,500 species of grass, “which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven.” And let’s not forget sparrows, of which there are 140 species. Is all this really necessary? Is this any way to run a world?

But, let's not stop there. Did you know that there are over 400,000 known species of beetle? Why would God do that? How many species do we really need? One might be enough. Or maybe a dozen, if we were feeling wild about beetles. But 400,000? That's just crazy.

How about mushrooms? They are types of fungus, for crying out loud. But there are 14,000 known species of mushroom.

There are 1,100 species of bat! Flying mammals that are so blind, they need to use sonar to find food and get around (which is pretty miraculous, if you stop and think about it). And they range in size from a wingspan of a mere 6 inches to 5 feet across.

I could go on for quite a while, listing the amazing variety of species of animals and plants that God has put here. But, my point is that Jesus is saying that God is very, very generous. Our world was not made from a sense of scarcity, but from a sense of glorious abundance. God was not being stingy, but generous beyond our wildest imaginations.

Speaking of wild imaginations, I have one last statistic. Scientists believe there are 300 sextillion stars in the observable universe. That would be 3 followed by 23 zeros. Do you think God was thinking about what you or I could see on a clear night? Not a chance, because we cannot see more than 3,000 stars at any one time with the naked eye. And we're not talking grains of sand here. Stars are very, very large. And our universe holds at least 300 sextillion, with probably as many more to be discovered as science figures out how to peer even deeper into the universe.

God is generous. This is hard for someone who is working as hard as they can to keep hearth and home together to believe. But, it's true. God's generosity to all his children is not based on worthiness. It's just there. Every day. If you know someone who may not be convinced of God's generosity because of their own personal scarcity, maybe you need to do something to show them how generous God is.

God is not limited to beetles and bats and stars to demonstrate his generosity. God uses those of us who follow Christ to show his generosity. God's abundance blesses us. Should we not be generous? Should we not share God's abundance with people who need to experience it for themselves?

If we pay attention to what Jesus says, to “strive first for the kingdom of God,” then our lives will reflect to the world God’s generosity. But, that doesn’t mean if we strive for the kingdom first, then we can go strive after whatever we want after that. It isn’t chronological. Jesus is saying that striving for the kingdom of God is our primary task. We are to seek God’s kingdom before and above all else. Everything else will follow. Everything else we *need*, that is; not everything else we *want*. Those are two different things, and most of us here are old enough to know the difference.

So, if we are not running after money, and we are living in the sense of God’s abundance, and our own generosity, then perhaps we won’t worry about tomorrow. Jesus is very practical about this. Tomorrow has its own worries. To worry about tomorrow today just piles up all those worries.

And, what is worry anyway? Do we worry about things we can control? Or the things we cannot control? Either way, Jesus warns us away from worry altogether. Planning for tomorrow is a completely different thing. Making plans can help give shape to the day. Worrying just causes ulcers and gray hair. Worry is, in fact, a testament to our lack of faith in God. Jesus is clear about this.

So, if we recognize the limits of our powers, and trust God to take care of the rest, we can simply stop worrying. Our worrying never accomplished anything of value. Our God is a generous God, a God of abundance. Let’s live as though we trust God, and believe in his generosity. Let’s live out of his abundance, and share with everyone who doesn’t know abundance in their lives. That way, in us those people will experience God’s generosity towards them. And if we pay attention, we’ll hear God’s call to do just that.