

Jesus said, “Don’t worry.” He said it four times - in verses 25, 27, 31, and 34, Jesus said “do not worry.” In the Greek language the word is *merimna*. *Merimna* means to have a divided mind. It is when one side of your mind says, “Everything is going to be O.K.,” while at the same time the other side of your minds says, “Maybe it won’t.” In our passage there are two tenses for this word *merimna* meaning (1) if you are worried this morning then stop. (2) If you are not worried then don’t start. So, whether you are a worrier or not, this passage applies to all of us. Jesus said, “Don’t worry.” But is it O.K. for me to confess that there have been times in my life when I have struggled with this?

This morning we are continuing our series of sermons on our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount. In the 5th, 6th, and 7th chapters of Matthew, Jesus Christ is teaching us the values of the Kingdom of Heaven. These teachings are so simple that a preschooler can understand them – but they are so opposite of our fallen human nature that when we try to live these words on our own we struggle. And I think that is the point. As Christians we do not face life on our own. Jesus said, “Lo, I am with you always even until the end of the age.” I believe that Jesus wants us to face life with Him. When Jesus preached his first sermons among us he said that “The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” We tend to think that Jesus came so that we can get to heaven. That is true. But Jesus also came to get heaven into us. Our Lord wants to pour out His Kingdom upon us. He wants to fill us with his Holy Spirit. He wants to take, remake, and reshape our lives according to the ways of heaven. Friends, when I get to heaven I will not be worried about anything. I will kneel before His throne and know that God reigns and that our Lord is in control. In his Sermon on the Mount Jesus is inviting us to be a part of His kingdom now. Jesus said, “Don’t worry.” But sometimes we do, so this week I did some research.

According to a recent study, 40% of the things we worry about never happen. They are wasted worries. 30% of the things we worry about have already happened and we can’t do anything about it. 12% of our worries are about our health, and we can all strive to live healthier lives. 10% of our worries are about the small stuff – don’t sweat the small stuff. That means that 92% of the things that we worry about are not worth worrying about. But that didn’t do me one bit of good because that means that 8% of our worries are real worries and that is more than enough to keep me up at night.

Arthur Roche defined worry as “a thin trickle of fear that runs through our minds. If left unchecked it will cut a ravine so deep and so wide that all our other thoughts will fall into it.” I think the best definition that I’ve heard comes from Edwin Marquart who said that “*worry is the opposite of faith.*”

One night I was in a Bible Study and we were talking about Ephesians 2:8 where Saint Paul said that we are saved by grace (it is a gift from God) that comes through faith. What is faith? One person in the group raised their hand and said, “Faith is when you are driving down a road, and it is late at night, and it is snowing, and there is ice all over the

road, and you are afraid, and you are worried that you will never make it home, so you say a prayer: “Lord, I believe in you. I trust you, and I know that you will see me through. That is faith,” he said. Someone else in the group said, “No, that is not faith. Faith is when your wife is driving you down a road - or your husband – and it is dark and icy and snowing.” The point is that we want to be in the driver’s seat. We want to be the one in control. Faith is not when God is your copilot – rather it is when God is *the* pilot and when we willing to put our lives in His hands. That is closer to what Christ is teaching us this morning. In verse 24, Jesus said, “You can’t serve two masters.”

The 6th chapter of Matthew Jesus Christ is discussing money. Jesus said, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust consume, and where thieves can break in and steal at night. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” This has broad applications. If you examine the things we worry about it can be a pretty good indicator of what we value. When we inordinately value the things of the world, the things of the world can drive us, consume us, and control our lives. Jesus said, “You can’t serve two masters.”

I have wrestled with the 6th chapter of Matthew all week long and it boils down to a simple but profound question: *can we trust God with our worries and our fears?*

Jesus said, “Consider the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly father feeds them.” I don’t believe that Jesus is speaking against farmers who sow seeds, or reap the harvest, or store away in barns. Rather, Jesus is speaking against our tendency to worry. If God takes care of the birds of the air then don’t you think God will take care of us?

So, is Jesus saying that He wants us to be like birds? No jobs, no work, no worries? Just sit around and let God take care of us? Actually, I think birds work hard. Birds are constantly building nests, searching for food, taking care of their young ones and providing for their families. Birds feed their children, protect their children, and teach their children how to fly. Birds are very responsible and hard working creatures! What they don’t do is worry.

We are more like the children’s story of the three baby birds. Once upon a time there were three birds that lived happily in a nest. Then one day the momma bird nudged one of the baby birds out of the nest and onto a branch. The nudged the bird again, it fell off the branch, spread its wings, and it flew. Then the momma bird nudged the second bird out of the nest and onto the branch. After a nudge the bird fell off the branch, spread its wings and flew. Then the momma nudged the third bird out of the nest and onto the branch. This little bird knew what was coming and the bird became worried. When nudged, the third bird did not fall off the branch; rather it fell over the branch, holding on for dear life, and ended up swinging upside down. The point of the story is that there is more to life that God wants to offer us. God wants us to live the life that He intended for us – the life He created us for. He wants us to soar with the Spirit. The prophet Isaiah said, “He will lift us up on eagle’s wings.” But when we cling to our old life, when we hold on to the life we have, we will end up with an upside down perspective and values

that are more aligned with the world than with heaven. Jesus said, “Consider the birds of the air... If God takes care of the birds don’t you think that He will take care of us?”

Jesus said, “Consider the lilies of the field...” *Lilies of the field* are most likely a reference to wild flowers. Normally when we think of the lands of the bible, we think of deserts. That would be southern Israel. Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount on a hillside overlooking the north end of the Sea of Galilee, which was and is a beautiful place. The sea was sparkling blue; the hills were green and dotted with wildflowers. More specifically, Galilee has beautiful red poppies. Jesus said, “Look at the wild flowers. They do not wear fancy clothes, yet Solomon in all his glory is not as beautiful as a wildflower.” I don’t think Jesus is against us wearing clothes. I think Jesus is speaking against our tendency to worry about such things.

One of my favorite movies is *Shallow Hal*, for two reasons. First, it was filmed right here in Charlotte. Secondly, it has a great message. Jack Black plays the part of Hal who is fixated on how people look. Then one day he bumps into Tony Robbins who hypnotizes Hal so that he will see the inner beauty in people. I love this movie because in a light hearted way it addresses a silent pain that many people have. Most people don’t like the way they look and many people are worried about the way others perceive them. *I am not thin enough. I am not pretty enough. I am not smart enough. I am not talented enough. I am not athletic enough. I am not popular enough. I am not --- enough!* But do you know what Jesus said about such worldly worries?

Jesus said, “Consider the wildflowers. If God makes the grass of the field so beautiful, that is here today and gone tomorrow, then don’t you think that you are beautiful to God?”

Finally, Jesus said, “Do not worry about tomorrow.” If I’m going to worry this is what I’m worried about. I’m going to worry about my family’s future, the future of our church, the future of the economy, the future of our country and the future of the world. That is what I would worry about. But after wrestling with the 6th chapter of Matthew, I think that Jesus is telling me that the future of the world is too big for me to handle. God can handle the future. As for me, Jesus said, “Let the days trouble be sufficient for the day.”

There have been times in my life when I have struggled with this. I wrestle with the Sermon on the Mount. I believe Jesus wants me to wrestle with this and to seek Him in the midst of it. The key verse to the 6th chapter of Matthew is verse 33- Jesus said, “Seek first the kingdom of God... When our mind, heart, and soul is not divided but focused on God – when He is the master and our lives belong to Him, Jesus said “Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added unto you.” If God takes care of the birds and the wildflowers, I know that God will take care of me.

Remember the story about the three baby birds? Well, I don’t want to leave the little fellow hanging. How does the story end? When the momma saw the little bird hanging upside down, she walked out onto the branch and pecked the little bird’s feet. I know that sounds cruel but that is what momma birds do – she pecked the little birds feet until

it let go, and spread its wings, and flew. Sometimes when we struggle I think God is pecking at our hearts. Are we willing to let go of our fears and worries and trust God?

Said the bird to the wildflower, "I would really like to know why these anxious humans worry so. Said the wild flower to the bird; "It must be that they have no Heavenly Father such as cares for you and me." Jesus said; consider the birds and the wild flowers - there is a lesson to be learned from them.