

MOUNTAIN VIEWS - WORRY  
A SERMON BASED ON MATTHEW 6:25-34  
PREACHED AT CHIPPAWA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
NIAGARA FALLS, ONTARIO  
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2018  
10:00 a.m.

Today, I will let you in on a preacher trade secret.

Preachers secretly like it

when Jesus' speaks in confusing ways or with elusive stories,  
or says things that go against what we would define  
as common sense.

It gives us work to do.

In Jesus' story of the workers in the vineyard,

those hired at the end of the day get paid the same  
as those hired at the beginning of the day

and somehow this tells us

something about what the kingdom of heaven is like.

That'll need some explanation.

Jesus said,

"If anyone comes to me

and does not hate his own father and mother  
and wife and children and brothers and sisters,  
yes, and even their own life, they cannot be my disciple.”

That'll need a good deep dive into the text.

Jesus said,

“Truly, truly, I say to you,

unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood,  
you have no life in you.

Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood

has eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day.

Always a great text on communion Sunday.

The preacher gets to make it intelligible.

Sayings like these,

stories like these,

these give the preacher something to talk about,

something to clarify,

something to teach.

They give preachers work to do.

Jesus has not been elusive or mysterious today.

He has spoken in about as plainly a way as you will find in the Bible.

In fact, he has said it plainly

and then repeated it for emphasis.

Do not worry.

Do not worry.

Do not worry.

It would be an obvious make work project for the preacher to ask

‘But what do you think he really is saying in this text?’

There is no mystery here, no nifty revelation

no dramatic uncovering of meaning.

Do not worry.

Easy for me to say.

Shortest sermon ever.

Do not worry.

Easy for you to say.

Except, have you ever tried just do not worry?

Have you ever tried to stop a worrier from worrying?

There is nothing easy about what Jesus has said here.

Nor is there anyone arguing in favour of worry.

No one thinks worry is a virtue.

No one is cheering for worry.

No one thinks worry is a life skill to be developed and enhanced.

No one lays awake in the night wondering if they are sufficiently worried.

No one thinks going over and over and over and over stuff in your head

is just the best, healthiest and most spiritual thing ever.

If they did, I'd be worried.

The English word worry

has historical roots coming from the meaning to strangle.

This makes perfect sense to me.

We know what it is to have worry's hands on our throats,

squeezing, making it hard to breath

making it feel like the veins on our forehead are going to pop.

Strangle feels exactly right for what worry is.

Do not worry. Of course.

No one wants to be strangled.

Except this particular version of the word in its old English,

isn't the gentle slow pressure strangulation.

Have you ever watched your dog with a stuffed toy?

She grabs it at the neck,

and then shakes her head,

throwing the toy back and forth until the stuffing comes out.

The word worry comes from that kind of strangle.

That's right.

Worry is worse than you thought.

And now the committed worriers are worried about worrying.

But, Jesus said, do not worry.

Worry.

Strangled. Choked.

Back in 1992, Harvey Penick of Texas first published

the Little Red Book which is sort of the "golfer's Bible."

I've read that is now considered a must-read for any golfer.

In it, Mr. Penick said that most golfers do not think on the golf course;

they just worry.

He writes,

“Worrying is a misuse of your mind on the golf course,”

“Whatever your obstacle, worry will only make it more difficult.

Worry causes your muscles to tense up,

and it is impossible to make a good golf swing

when your muscles are too tense.”

Strangled. Choked.

Do not worry.

We know.

It's not confusing.

It is just challenging.

If I wanted to turn preaching the Word of God,

into a TED talk, or a motivational talk,

I could lead you through the myriad of strategies that are out there

for beating worry.

Jesus isn't the only one saying 'Don't worry.'

The How To, and What To, and 6 Ways To, and 7 Things For,  
they are prolific.

To be fair, there is some good wisdom out there.

One of the things you will read often, is the advice  
to come to terms with the fact that there are things you can't control.

Control is a huge thing for us.

But there is a lot, a lot more than we are willing to admit,  
that we can actually control.

But you can't control the weather.

So laying awake worrying it might snow,  
which could block your way to the airport,  
or mean that your flight gets cancelled,  
delaying your getting to somewhere warm,  
well, you can't control that.

We want good things for our kids.

So we try and control their choices and direction,

based on what we've learned in life,  
based on principles we have experienced to be true,  
based on what we think would be right for them.

It makes sense when they are five.

It stops making sense when they are fifty-five.

We want good things.

But worrying about other people,

trying to control other people and outcomes for them,

beyond an offer of help, support or guidance,

well trying to control rarely builds

positive, mutual, respectful relationship.

So there is advice out there.

There is the wise advice to make sure

that the anxiety is not biological in nature.

Anxiety and Depression are cousins

and they can be a serious medical issue

needing medical treatment.

That is a different kind of conversation



than just typical worrying.

That is a conversation for a doctor.

But there is also advice for general worrying.

Amy Morin from Psychology Today says,

if you are worrying about what you can't control,

determine what you *can* control, and do that.

Have a plan B for bad weather.

Seeing others' behaviours, or others' choices,

you can't control what they do,

but you can decide on and control your reaction.

If you are worrying about others, ask yourself, what is mine?

What is theirs?

If it is theirs - leave it with them.

There is the advice that if you are worrying, identify and name your fears.

Drill down and get to the core.

I call it the 'then what' or 'so what' method.

You drill down, then what? then what? then what?

What if I do a poor job on this presentation at work?

Then what?

I might not get the promotion.

Then what?

I won't be moving up in the company as I thought as I would.

Then what?

Well where I think I should be

and where I actually am

might not sync up.

Then what?

Know the fear and address the fear.

There is the advice to be aware that there is a difference  
between problem solving and spinning.

What would I do if my partner died?

She does all the banking, makes all the meals.

He takes care of the finances, the house, buying the next car.

Spinning just asks the question over and over.

What will I do? What will I do? What will I do?

That's spinning.

Problem solving says, I will learn how to do that.

I can learn it now.

Or, I am a capable person, I'll learn it as needed,  
or I'll find someone who can do that work.

The advice is to grow positive statements about yourself.

You can say things like,

I figured out that challenge in my past.

I survived that.

It was hard but we did it.

We've handled worse. We've got this.

So do not worry.

Easy to say.

Easy for Psychology Today to say.

Easy for me to say.

Easy for you to say.

Easy for Jesus to say.

But if you are spinning.

Or unable to sleep.

Or feeling nauseous from what is running in your head.

Do not worry can sound

pedantic, and cliché, and it can ring false.

Right up there on the list with,

“I’m sure it will be fine.”

“It’ll be okay.”

“Don’t worry.”

Well, it’s right up there.

If it wasn’t Jesus who was saying it,

we could dismiss it the same way we do people who say

it will be okay.

Easy to say

But it is Jesus,

and we are his followers,

so we do well to look more closely and listen more carefully.

Today’s passage started with a therefore.

“Therefore I tell you”

Which means Jesus was continuing his thought.

Jesus was saying “for that reason”, Do not worry

“Consequently” do not worry.

Jesus had just finished saying, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, but treasures in heaven.”

saying, ‘Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.’

saying “You can’t serve two masters.

You’ll be devoted to one and despise the other.

You can’t serve both God and Money.”

Therefore,

Do not worry, about your life.

Do not worry, about food, drink, clothes.

Do not worry, about tomorrow.

What Jesus is calling for here,

is so much more than a TED talk on strategies to reduce worry

so that you can sleep better.

What Jesus is calling for here is a complete transition

and turning upside down of his followers’ priorities.

He is not presenting strategies to worry less,  
he's calling out his followers  
and throwing out any priorities  
that are less than worthy of the kingdom.

You are worried about material things?

Food, address, clothes?

God knows you need these. Look at the birds.

God feeds them.

You are more valuable than they are.

You are worried about tomorrow?

You aren't going to add one single hour to your days with worry.

What your worry will do is attach you to less than kingdom things.

What your worry will do is give you a new master.

What your worry will do is put God to the side,

while you try to take control,

because you don't have enough faith that God has got this.

And more importantly, that God has got you.

What your worry does is send you chasing after, and running after  
all the things people without God chase after,  
status, security, safety, stimulation.

Jesus calls us,  
not to a “7 ways to solve your worry” TED talk.  
He calls us to a complete overhaul of priorities.

Seek first his kingdom.

Seek first, his righteousness.

It's such an old joke but it still makes me laugh.

There was a German coastguard

who got a call from a British ship.

From the British ship he heard said "Mayday, mayday, we are sinking!

We are sinking!", to which the German coastguard replied:

'Yah, Yah, ... vat are you sinking about?'

What are you sinking about?

Jesus said where your treasure is your heart will be also.

He said you cannot serve two masters.

Even if, especially if, one of those masters is you,  
trying to control all.

Do not worry about your life.

Do not worry about about food, drink, clothes.

Do not worry about tomorrow.

Do no worry means redirection, refocus and retooling.

Seek first the kingdom.

Seek first, righteousness.

Be thinking about the right things.

Do the right things.

Back in his golf book Penick said,

“Whatever your obstacle,

worry will only make it more difficult.

Worry causes your muscles to tense up,

and it is impossible to make a good golf swing

when your muscles are too tense.”



“Rather than worrying,” he said,

“be mindful of the shot at hand

and go ahead and play it

as if you are going to hit the best shot of your life.

You really might do it.”

Turn your priorities over and upside down.

Worry will drop out.

Seek first the kingdom of God.

Be mindful of the shot at hand.

Seek righteousness first.

What is the good, fruitful, faithful, righteous,

Christ-like thing to strive for,

to do.

Do that.

Go ahead and play it as the best shot of your life.

Seek first the kingdom of God.

Seek first his righteousness.

The rest will follow.

Don't you worry.

Amen.