

"What? Me Worry?"

I speak to you in the name of He who is, who was and who is yet to come. Amen. PBS

Let's begin by picking up where we left off last week. Job has been sitting in a pile of ashes, covered in sores, scratching himself. He's feeling, generally, quite miserable.

It sounds like God is chastising Job, when in fact, the comments are directed at Elihu who had been sounding off to Job about God's might and how God must be feared.

God shows up and says "Do you know when the mountain goats give birth?" "Is it by your wisdom that the hawk soars and spreads its wings?"

In other words, God is letting Job know that God is in charge.

Job doesn't need to be concerned with that "stuff".

It's not Job's job.

Or Elihu's job, for that matter.

Or our job, for that matter. More on that in a moment.

The Psalmist picks up from last week's psalm in talking about the animals, the crops, the sun and the moon, all created by God and all working together in harmony for humanity. The picture painted is a beautiful one of serenity and order. The trees grow tall that the birds may nest in them.

The sun sets and the nocturnal animals come out to play and hunt and survive. And once the sun rises the animals go to sleep and the people come out to labour until the days end. It is, in short, the natural order of things.

In the Epistle for today, Paul is writing to the Church in Corinth. A church that is in danger of fraction and division. Paul's associate Chloe has reported that there are quarrels and divisions. Paul, cleverly, asks to whom they all belong. "What I mean is that each of you says 'I belong to Paul', or 'I belong to Apollos', or 'I belong to Cephas', or 'I belong to Christ'".

How frustrating it is when I hear people who claim to be Christians use Paul's language to defend homophobic comments or actions. I have said to some of these folks that they have no right to call themselves Christians if they continually use the words of Paul instead of those of Christ.

Jesus is about love, not division.

He took the 10 commandments which we were having difficulty keeping, and broadened them to two commandments:

Love God and love your neighbour as yourself.

In short, if it's not of love, it's not of God.

If it's about division and exclusion, it's not about God.

Now, here's the tricky bit...the Gospel for today.

Let me just say, if worry were an Olympic sport, I would be a multiple gold medal winner.

Worry to me, is as natural as breathing.

And that's not a good thing.

I can worry about things over which I have no control...such as the weather, the state of the world, how someone will react to something I say or do. I worry about things over which I have control – how I will react to someone or something.

I worry about whether I'll get enough sleep, then after going to bed earlier than usual and following my night time routine, I lay awake fretting that I'm not sleeping.

Does this happen to anyone else?

Lately I've been blaming menopause, but I don't know for how much longer I can use that as an excuse.

In Luke's gospel, Jesus says "life is more than food and the body more than clothing." He goes on to say "Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?"

Well, can we? Of course not.

I have an awesome counsellor and I see her every two to three weeks. I saw her on Friday and she asked how things are going with Shared Ministry. I told her last week's liturgy went well, with a couple of mistakes (at Knox) and the homily was generally well received.

She asked how much I worried about it. I smiled and replied "The usual amount".

She smiled and said "And how much time did you gain?"

You'd think the woman knew Luke's gospel!!!

The reality of it, is worry cannot give you more time; in fact, it causes you to waste time. Because every hour spent in worry is an hour you'll not get back. Every minute fretting brings you one minute closer to the end of your life, with absolutely no gain.

You may or may not know I struggle with depression and anxiety. Thanks be to God I don't generally struggle with both at the same time because when I do it's awful, horrible, soul-rendering. This past week has been a struggle of both. Depression rears up and tells me I'm not good enough. Anxiety rears up and tells me everyone will find out I'm a fraud.

And together those messages can be paralyzing.

Depression and anxiety are not about mood. They are about chemistry. You can't smile your way out of depression, or watch a funny movie to alleviate anxiety. It takes much, much more than that.

In the Spring I took a course through the Fernie Health Unit called "Cognitive Behavioural Therapy" or CBT. In it you learn to identify unhealthy patterns of thought and ways to combat or answer those negative thoughts. One of the exercises is to take a set amount of time,

to set a timer for, say, 30 minutes, and allow yourself to fret and worry – to take the fear and anxiety to a ridiculous level.

For example, What's the worse thing that could happen if my homily is not well received? I could lose the support of the congregations...who would think they made a mistake in appointing me to this shared ministry position... which means they'd write to both Denominational leaders and ask for me to be removed... which would mean I'd lose my job... which would mean I'm now unemployable... which means I would lose my home... which means I would end up living under the bridge... At this point in the exercise I'm usually laughing because I know there is no logical way that would ever happen.

All of this to say I'm not losing my mind...I'm using the tools I've been given to help cope with these disorders. Mental illness such as anxiety and depression are diseases as legitimate as heart disease or diabetes. When they are treated properly and respond well to treatment they are manageable.

Do you see how all of this works? Untreated, they can be debilitating. With treatment, in my case medication, support systems and therapy, I can work through the darkness and return to the light.

What does all of this have to do with today's scripture?

Well, lemme tell ya...

God tells Job that it's not Job's job to worry about the mountain goats, the wild asses or the hawks. That's God's job.

Paul reminds the people of Corinth that they belong to God; not to Paul or Apollos, or Cephas, but Christ Himself.

And finally Jesus tells us that worry will not add one iota of time to our lives. It will not improve our lives. It will cost us and in some cases, cost us dearly.

Now, let me ask you...if someone comes up and begins a conversation with "now, don't get mad", how do you feel – at least initially? For me, I'm already a bit miffed.

So, if you notice someone worrying, the last thing they need to hear is "Don't worry". Or even less helpful "Cheer up now, let's see a smile".

What is helpful is to ask "what is causing you to worry". And give them an opportunity talk about the worry. When someone is worrying, please don't tell them how to feel. Emotions are meant to be felt, whether they are logical or illogical.

Sometimes simply saying it aloud takes the power and energy away from the worry. Similar to the exercise of going to the extreme of "what could go wrong"; by shining a light on it, the darkness loses all power and efficacy.

God tells us that we don't need to worry about these things, God's got them.

In my head I believe this. In my heart though, a little different reaction.

At the end of the day, God has what it takes to deal with the worries of the world. I can set them down. Jesus invites us to lay our troubles at the foot of the cross. He will pick up those burdens and carry them if they need to be carried. And I suspect in most cases, those burdens need not be picked up. Because with God all things are possible.

Let all God's children say Amen.

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Job 39.1-8, 26-30, Psalm 104.14-23  
1 Corinthians 1.10-23, Luke 12.22-31