

What? Me Worry?

What is the least effective way to stop someone from worrying?
It is to tell them to stop worrying.

In the history of the world, I don't believe anyone has EVER stopped worrying because someone told them to do so.

It's the same sort of reaction to someone beginning a conversation with "don't get mad". What's your reaction? Anger.

If the doctor tells you to relax, what do you do?
Clench up like a balled up fist.

Or maybe that's just me.

I used to be a world class worrier. If worrying had been an Olympic Sport I would be a multiple gold medal winner, I could worry for Canada.

Don't get me wrong, there are still times I worry and there are times when I work myself into a lather, fretting about things, most of which I cannot control.

I have found something that helps me process my worrying in a positive way.
Keep listening to learn how.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is speaking to his disciples in the usual parabolic format. First it's the Ravens. They have no storehouses, no way to reap and yet God provides for them. We are told, "For life is more than food, and the body, more than clothing." (Luke 12.23). In other words, worrying will not give us food, or provide us with clothing.

The ravens do not worry, and as we are considered to be "of more value" than the birds, we need not worry about what we will eat and what we will wear. This is a palatable sentiment in a parable, but not so in reality.

What about the homeless, Jesus??
What about the naked, Jesus??
What about the starving, Jesus??

The parabolic formula for this reading doesn't work in reality because it gives us the false impression that we don't need to worry about our siblings who are starving, naked and homeless. Jesus will look after that – right?

Verse 25 tells us this "And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?" This sentence has always infuriated me.

No, I cannot add a second to my life. I cannot add a minute to my life. I cannot add an hour to my life by worrying. Yes, Jesus, I know that in worrying I have lost that time – time I will never get back.

But here's the thing –

Remember I promised to tell you how I learned to stop worrying?
I play a game with myself. It's called "What's the worst thing that could happen?" I set a timer for 15 minutes or even as long as 30 minutes and I ask myself, if x happens, what's the worst thing that could happen? And then, for that time I allow myself to spiral into the ridiculous.

I haven't denied that worry exists, I've allowed myself time to worry in a constructive way. I don't allow the worry to take over every facet of my life and become uncontrollable.

The end of the reading for today is not the end of the chapter.

It goes on to say:

'Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.
For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.'

(Luke 12.32-34, NRSV)

Please keep in mind when reading the Bible that the chapters and verse numbers were added in the mid-15th Century. They are completely arbitrary.

Jesus wants us to know that if we put all our faith and trust in God we will be richly rewarded. If we put our faith and trust in God we will never want for anything. God has created such a system for the earth's wildlife that they need never worry.

Birds do not worry, well, as far as we KNOW, they don't worry. They look for food, find it and eat. They look for bedding to make their nests, find it and build. They mate, lay eggs, have babies and the circle of life continues.

Which is as it should be. What is how it has always been?

Except global warming. The climate crisis. The extinction of roughly 26 species of birds per year. Which is roughly 417 million birds since 1970. The Audubon Society estimates that 1 in 4 birds have become extinct in the last 50 years.

There has been an increasing number of young people dying by suicide and by street drug use. I have a funeral this Saturday for a 21 year old young man who died from an overdose. A fun-loving, adventurous young man who had his first "big job" in the fracking industry in Calgary. He went out with his friends, came home and sometime in the next 48 hours died.

I've mentioned that I need your help. I have a dream of three ministries evolving and developing in our Parish. Today I want to ask for your help in Visitation. You know how full my schedule has been. You know I don't have a lot of time to spare. Yet there are many lonely people in the Parish and in the Community. People who want and need visiting..

I want a Ministry of Visitation to develop whereby a team of two will go and visit those who are shut-in or have difficulty getting out. They may not have the technology to attend worship by Zoom. The colder weather is coming and they may not be able to leave their homes. Yet we must stay connected to them. I cannot take it on. But you can.

I want our most vulnerable to know that their Parish family prays for them, and wants to visit over a cup of tea and a cookie. To check in, to visit, and possibly to pray.

Please consider participating in this Ministry.

I need someone to lead the Ministry.

I need people who will visit in other's homes.

I need people who will visit those in the hospital.

Training will be available should you wish. If you enjoy people and you enjoy chatting over a cup of coffee, this may be a good fit for you. You can be as busy as you wish. Please consider the Ministry of Visitation, even if you have never done it before.

Jesus tells us that the lilies neither toil nor spin, yet in all their glory they are more majestic and beautiful than the finest robes of Solomon. He reminds us that God clothes the grass of the field and then throws it into the furnace - how much more will God clothe us?

The apex of the argument is presented beautifully in verse 31 "Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well." In other words, if we spend our time working towards the coming of the kingdom, or indeed, creating the kingdom of God in our lifetime, all the rest of this stuff will be taken care of.

Worrying can be crippling and destructive. Worrying about the state of the world and falling into the "rabbit hole" of 24/7 news coverage can bring a person to a state of desperation. Worrying about things over which we have no control, such as the weather, can spiral us into sleeplessness and stomach upset.

And yet, taking time to face those feelings head on, and using a short amount of time can refocus and reframe things so they cease to be as overwhelming.

One of the things I do at the beginning of every memorial service is to remind people to breathe. Not the shallow breaths we take, especially when feeling under stress or overwhelmed, but the deep diaphragm breathing to restore oxygen balances.

Usually I encourage people to breathe with me three times. Deeply. In and out, three times. Then I remind them that breathing is the most important thing we can do. And if breathing deeply is the ONLY thing they do that day, that is absolutely enough.

I suppose Jesus is saying that worrying about little things is as useless as worrying about big things. If we put our faith in God, the little things will take care of themselves – and yet, if I don't do my laundry, Sir Vincent the Cat is definitely not going to do it for me –

And yet – Jesus speaks in parables and I speak in fluent sarcasm. Parables are not meant to be taken literally. Parables are meant to illuminate and illustrate and take us outside the literal. They can veer into the fantastic. It is important to remember that, when we tie ourselves up looking for meaning when what we should be looking for is nuance.

At the end of the day, worrying is not productive. If anything it can be destructive. And yet, it is important to recognise all emotions.

And so friends, I say to you, do not worry. Unless it's getting overwhelming. THEN set a timer for 15 to 30 minutes and play a speed round of "what's the worst thing that could happen". THEN, go outside and breathe. Hang out in Creation, give thanks, maybe have a chat with God.

Let the Church say Amen.

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