

“Today’s Troubles Are Enough”  
March 10, 2024

Isaiah 49:8-16a  
Matthew 6:25-34

“So do not worry about tomorrow.... Today’s trouble is enough for today.”

As with much of the Sermon on the Mount, those words bring mixed feelings.

One person claims that “Of all the passages in the Bible about trust in God, this is probably the most beloved.”<sup>1</sup>

Another imagines those first disciples of Jesus hearing this “with a combination of confusion and horror.”<sup>2</sup>

You can probably find yourself somewhere along that continuum.

Someone once told me that intelligent people have more anxiety. If your worries are many, you might find this flattering.

Or, maybe you don’t worry. You might be like the person in the recent *New Yorker* cartoon, protesting: “I’m not worrying—I’m warding off tragedies by constantly anticipating them.”

Wherever you find yourself, listen again as Jesus invites us Gentiles, we who strive and worry, to pause for a while—if only for a few minutes this morning—so that we might put our work and our lives and our striving into a larger context and rest in God’s love and care for us.

Listen again—as if for the first time, or maybe *actually* for the first time—to that wonderful question Jesus asks those who would follow him, even us: “Are you not of more value than the birds of the air?”

This is where listening to Jesus today gets both difficult and important.

It is difficult because so many know devastating experiences in their own lives and see disastrous events in the world that call into question God’s love and care. Even Jesus cried out: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

It is also difficult because we can hear simply a little self-esteem pep talk—not that most of us couldn’t use even that. If that is all that we hear in these words we will miss their import.

Listen through the difficulty. Looking with us at the birds and the flowers, Jesus invites us to consider the value God places on each one of us and all of us.

It is not too much to say that we are God’s treasure: broken, hurting, *sinful*—and infinitely loved by the God who creates and renews—of more value than the bird or the flowers. This does not disparage the rest of creation or minimize the importance of our stewardship of the earth. But these words of Jesus encourage us. For there are times when fear and failure press in. There are times when self-doubt and despair seem the soundest approach to take.

At such times Jesus asks with deep love: “Are you not of more value?”

That question carries with it the judgment of God in the most welcome sense of that phrase.

You are of great value. These are the words to remember when it is three in the morning and the worry that plagues you does not cease. These are the words to remember when your music does not sound as you imagine it should, when the needed inspiration does not come, when the project falls apart, when the relationship crumbles. These are the words that invite us to give all that we have and all that we are to our families and our friends, to our community and our work in these days so filled, as all days are filled, with possibility and danger.

God’s gracious judgment has come and it is this: you are of great value.

With that judgment on our minds and in our hearts, we can better hear again the words of Jesus: “Do not worry... do not strive.”

Of course, no one stops worrying simply because someone says to them: “Don’t worry”—even if that *someone* is Jesus.

Faced with our fragility, our *mortality*—as we are especially during Lent—we can—and do—worry about our life, what we will eat and what we will drink and what we will wear, and how we will pay for all those things.

Worry has its place, but its benefits are limited. It doesn’t increase our height or our length of days. It doesn’t write the paper or finish the project. But if we can’t eliminate our anxiety, perhaps we can at least be aware of it.

And we can let an awareness of our fragility lead to a deepening sense of grace—a sense of God’s care for all of creation, and, yes, even for us in our prosperity and in our adversity. Even in our worry and our striving, through the prophet, the mothering God asks us: “Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hand.”

When Jesus urges us to consider the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, then, he is asking us to do just that—consider. We are not called to become flowers or animals, but to *take into account* God’s providential care for all creation as we face all that worries and perplexes us as we live our very human lives.

In our worry, in our striving, Jesus invites us as the much-valued children of God to recognize the care that we receive, the abundance in which we live, the wealth that is ours—and to live accordingly.

It is good to plan, to succeed, to do well. We know that the life of faith looks toward the future. Good stewardship of all that God has given requires that we plan. And certainly, we cannot be generous unless we first earn.

So, Jesus does invite us to strive—to get up and get going—but to strive for what he called the “realm of God.” God’s realm is the image of that place, that time, of peace, of justice, of right relationships, of love, of beauty.

God's realm is *not here*—and yet from time to time we recognize that it *is here* among us. And when we strive to think more clearly, when we strive to create beauty, when we strive to extend welcome and compassion to others, or to love deeply—we are striving for the realm of God.

The call to striving and to trusting in God's good care does not exempt us from working or keep us from having property. Jesus speaks to people who sow and reap and store, people who toil and spin—that is to people like you and me. The gentle invitation to not worry about our lives does not take us out of the world, but rather immerses us *in* the world—so that we might more fully love our neighbors and care for the poor, and seek peace and justice.

As Christians we recognize that we live in a material world, created and called good by God. We give thanks to God for all that we do have. We also recognize that our sin, our separation from God, has a way of letting material goods take over our lives and our allegiances. And so we might also join in agreement with the medieval saint who said: “Thank God for all the things I do not own.”

God knows we need “all these things.”

God knows there are and will be trouble—enough trouble for each day.

Deal with what you can and face tomorrow when it arrives. It's not that Jesus was a positive thinker or naïve about what could happen. Jesus wasn't one to minimize the trouble in any situation. He knew what was in the human heart. He knew the real possibilities of evil and misfortune.

But he also had a deep and abiding sense of the loving care of God—and commended that trust to his followers.

While we often ask: “What will I do *when* . . . or “What will I do *if* . . .?” While we often ask, “What will I do *next*?” We might be better off to ask: “What *can* I do *now*?” remembering the proverb: “If you *can* do nothing, you *need* do nothing.” We are called to act when we are able—indeed, to do all that we possibly can—and we are invited to abide in God's care at those times when nothing can be done. As is has been suggested, we should act as though it all depends on us and we should pray as though it all depends on God.

“Tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.” Jesus focuses our attention on what we can do in the present moment—and on what God is able to do when we can do nothing.

We live with the awareness that there is a power at loose in the world that is greater than our anxious worry. If we want to use religious language, we would call that power of the Resurrection

In the greatest adversity, when God seems silent or absent, God is still at work in the world and in our lives. In a world that moves toward death and despair, resurrection turns us in the direction of life and hope. This faith in the God revealed through Jesus Christ, who leads us to hope and to act for the good in all the adversity of life, that is to say, to *strive for the realm of God*.

More than half way through Lent, do you have any kind of special practice that you have taken up? If not, let me suggest this:

Take a few minutes today—and if you can, take a few minutes *each* day—to rest, to rest in the care, the love, and the strength of God.

You can do that.

You can do that for a few minutes.

The day and all its trouble will wait while you rest.

And from that place of rest, out of that deep consideration, rise and greet the new day with all of its worry and challenge and trouble in peace, in strength, in hope.

Through it all remember: you are of great value to God.

To the God who created you and holds you,

to the God who will not forget you,

you are of great value.

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas Hare, *Matthew*, Interpretation Series, pg. 73.

<sup>2</sup> Amy-Jill Levine, *Sermon on the Mount*, pg. 104