

Are You Feeling Anxious Lately? 3 Pentecost A

Jesus said, “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life....” Are you feeling anxious lately? I am. I worry about the same things you do and I strive to let go of those things I have no control over. I find myself sneaking a look back at worry and trying to take pieces of it back. That is sin and I confess it!

After a loss of a lot of data on our office computer I spent over eight hours backing up my computer’s hard drive last week which contains 3 years of Trinity correspondence and files on all ministries not to mention decades of sermons that serve as references for new ones. Time is a costly commodity.

Then there is money. I don’t worry about money. I worry about paying my bills and tithing on time. Isn’t that the same thing? Apparently, many of you are worried about money. Our pledges that reflect giving to God’s work reveals tremendous anxiety over money – for as of last month we are more than \$15 thousand behind in pledges. Yet Jesus says, “I tell you, do not worry about your life....” The church after all does belong to Jesus and we his people are the church.

Anxiety remains a problem in our lives, however. We struggle mightily to fight it back and keep it in check. St Paul understood this when he wrote from prison, “Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6,7).

Anxiety can infect a whole town. As we read about the layoffs in local auxiliary companies and pending layoffs via GM’s attrition and restructuring program it makes the population of Janesville wonder about its future. Congregational anxiety can be another casualty as we are called upon more and more to help the needy. Good news! Jesus words for us today apply not just for individuals but for whole cities and an entire nation.

People’s values sustain them in hard times – not a balanced checkbook. Worry does not have to rule the day unless people choose it.

If only human beings would value the fact that God sees his people of more worth than the other creatures he has made. He

provides for the swallow tails outside my door who are building their nest very well. Can I trust God to do the same for me?

“And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?” A group of researchers put that to the test at the famed Mayo Clinic, published in its *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* medical journal, December, 2006. For those of you who like statistics here they are:

In the mid-60s some 7,000 students at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill took the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), a test that, among other things, measured the participants’ tendency to be optimistic or pessimistic. Of that group, 1,630 were found by the test to be clearly pessimists and 923 to be clearly optimists. The rest fell somewhere in the middle of a continuum between the clear extremes. Over the next four decades, 476 of those who had taken the test died, from causes ranging from accident to illness to suicide to homicide.

By tracking and collating all this information, researchers determined that *the pessimists had a significantly greater likelihood of dying sooner* from any cause than did the optimists. As the dry language of the findings report puts it, “... those who scored as pessimistic had decreased rates of longevity compared with optimistic individuals.” It also said, “The current results replicate, in a non-medical sample, those of [earlier studies] that suggest that optimism is associated with increased survival.”

So, to bring this back to where we started, worrying isn’t likely to add even an hour to your life; get rid of the worry, and you’ll live longer!

Pessimism and worry are not entirely identical. Pessimism is the tendency to take a gloomy view of life and to assume that most things ultimately drift or march toward negative outcomes. Worry is a mental and emotional response of concern or even fear to vague or unspecified threats. To describe the difference another way, we could say that pessimism is an outlook about things in general and worry is a response to possibilities in particular. It’s possible to be a pessimist without being a worrier. I’m not sure there is a cure for pessimism but I do know there is a cure for worry. I know because I worry about people, about bills, about the ministry of God and God has proven to me over and over to turn it (worry) over to Him.

At their root, both pessimism and worry are related to a shortage of hope and trust. Pessimism, which has no confidence that

things will work out, can breed despair, and that word literally means “un-hope.”

Worry is so human. We want to control the way things are and when we can't...we fret, we stress, we get sleepless and we get tired which only makes us worry more.

Jesus posed this question about adding to our span of life through worry to make clear that what he was calling for instead was for us to trust God. He pointed to the birds that do not sow or reap the fields but are fed by the heavenly Father nonetheless. He pointed to the flowers that do not toil or spin but are clothed in beauty by the heavenly Father anyway.

It's critical to understand, however, that his words were directed to people who *did* have to sow, to reap, to toil and to spin, and he wasn't telling them to stop doing those tasks. He simply wanted them to understand that their lives were a lot more than the sum of their sowing, reaping, toiling, spinning, or what they had to show for it at the end of the day!

Further, Jesus tied the call to not worry to the kingdom of God: “But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” That's a significant linkage because God's kingdom is the ultimate reason for optimism and hope. The very meaning of the kingdom is that *God and those who stand with him win*. In the end, good triumphs over evil. If you're a citizen of God's kingdom — and all who follow Jesus faithfully are — it's still possible that you might be pessimistic about human activity in the short term, but you've got every reason to be optimistic about God's activity in the long term.

When we stand with God we can laugh at the absurdities of life and what we tend to worry about. A last word therefore from nutrition and health:

It's a relief to know the truth after all those conflicting medical studies.

The Japanese eat very little fat and suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans.

The French eat a lot of fat and also suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans.

The Japanese drink very little red wine and suffer fewer heart attacks

than the British or Americans.

The Italians drink excessive amounts of red wine and also suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans.

The Germans drink a lot of beers and eat lots of sausages and fats and suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans.

Conclusion: Eat and drink what you like. Speaking English is apparently what kills you.

Laughter is the best cure for worry because when we can laugh at ourselves God laughs with us and worry must release its power.
Amen!