

Every year a lot of preparation goes into our celebration of Thanksgiving! And these days even if you aren't planning on having a big family dinner, there are still things that need to be done. We mask up and head to the grocery store to get supplies to make our feasts. We clean our houses for any guests that might be expected. As we are preparing to observe the Holiday, we tend to think about the things we are grateful for, so we have something to share at the dinner table, when everyone in the room shares what they are thankful for! Other emotions might also begin to surface as well: excitement at getting to enjoy a good meal and some much needed relaxation, sadness at not getting to observe Thanksgiving the way we would like, grief and sorrow over those who won't be with us, frustration at having to do a ton of work to get things ready, and above all these feelings, perhaps we start to worry, we start to stress out, and fear sets in!

Will there be enough food? Will people enjoy themselves and have a good time? Will there be a spike in Covid cases if people fail to follow safety guidelines as they gather to celebrate Thanksgiving with their families? And aside from these troubling questions, we may have other concerns on our minds that are causing us some anxiety or apprehension! Maybe we are dealing with the loss of a job? Perhaps we are struggling to pay all our bills, and the possibility of buying Christmas gifts for our loved ones seems unlikely. Maybe someone we care about is coping with a tragic illness.

Thankfully in today's Gospel message, Jesus tells his disciples, and all us participating in worship tonight, that we are not to worry! He goes on to declare that, as long as a person is a slave to the things of this world, and does not rest securely in the love and care of God, he or she will be filled with worry and anxiety! This makes a lot of sense when we look at our society which is consumed by materialism, technology, and greed. Many people become so focused on what they have, and what they want, that things like food, drink, and clothing, become

their primary concerns. These people typically do not depend on God to supply these things, which causes them to become slaves to their worry.

I can remember a time in my life, many years ago, when I had a great job at Microsoft; I lived in an extremely nice house and was able to afford some really nice things. It wasn't until I lost that job when I realized how dependent I was on money. While I was on unemployment my life turned upside down, and I began to reclaim my faith and began to rely more on God. In time, I found that if I gave the cares of this world over to God, especially those that were out of my control, he took care of them.

In today's Gospel, after Jesus poses his question, "can anyone add an hour to their lifespan by worrying," he goes on to point out; that what he is calling for us to do instead, is for us to trust God! He uses an illustration with animals pointing to birds that do not sow or reap the fields but are fed by His heavenly Father, nonetheless. He pointed to flowers that do not toil or spin; but are clothed in beauty by God anyway. It's important for us to keep in mind, that Jesus' words were directed to people who actually had to sow, to reap, to toil, and spin, and he wasn't telling them to stop doing those tasks; he simply wanted them to understand that their lives meant a great deal more than the sum of their sowing, reaping, toiling, spinning, or the creativity of their FaceBook profile or Twitter feed.

Taking this a step further, Jesus tied his call of not worrying 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." This is a significant connection, because God's kingdom is the ultimate reason for our optimism and hope. The very meaning of the kingdom is that God, and those who stand together with him, ultimately win! In the end, good triumphs over evil.

In fact, on another occasion, Jesus offered a similar suggestion for living out our faith: "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the

world.” And what does “take heart!” mean other than “be optimistic! Trust?” In fact, the King James translation words it as “be of good cheer.” So by bringing the kingdom of God into the discussion, Jesus reminds us that in the long haul, those of us who follow him have nothing to worry about!

Ok, so does that mean that we have no reason to be troubled? Perhaps some of us may have a few objections that make it hard for us to fully go along with Jesus’ teaching. **Objection #1:** The things most of us worry about are not long-term issues. Most of us don’t, for example, live our days in anxiety over how global warming will affect us. We seldom fret about how, or when the world will end. No, most of our concerns are over short-term issues like “Will I get a good report from the doctor?” “Will my kids stay out of trouble?” “Will I be able to pay the mortgage this month” And while many of us are not worriers by inclination, we can begin to loose heart whenever our worries begin to overwhelm us.

Objection #2: Normal anxiety, unavoidable worry that comes to almost everybody, can be a good thing. If everyone feels “normal anxiety” from time to time, then surely, we should not feel guilty about it. Furthermore, normal worry causes us to take preventative measures against potential problems, and even energizes us to make some significant and constructive changes in the way we live.

Objection #3: Jesus is SO logical in this passage. Almost too logical. It’s the very height of reason for him to say, in effect, “Since you trust God.... all things will ultimately work out for the good, and since you trust that he cares for you even more than he cares for birds and flowers, you therefore should not worry about what you will eat, or what you will drink, or what you will wear.”

Yeah..ok.... Unfortunately, logic doesn’t rule. We aren’t wired that way. We cannot neatly compartmentalize anxiety and then talk ourselves out of it. So we’ve got objections to being told not to worry! But there’s this: What all of our objections really tell us, is that we have missed the heart of what Jesus is talking

about in today's narrative. He is not giving us a dissertation on worry. Jesus is not Dr. Phil giving us a prescription for how to avoid anxiety. His main point is: "Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Strive for it. In other words, exert a lot of energy and put some effort into it.

Instead of simply saying we should rely on the eventual coming of God's kingdom as an antidote to daily worry, Jesus is saying we should actively work on spreading his kingdom. And as we do, some of the things we fret about are going to become non-issues because we've got more important things to be busy with.

None of this is to say that we won't be completely freed from our worrying. We can't love someone, without worrying about threats to their well-being. We can't be productive members of society, without occasional concerns as to whether we are doing what needs to be done. We cannot listen to the news without some uneasiness about the direction our world appears to be heading in. But, we **can** be focused enough on the things of God that we're able to relax our priorities and have confidence in God's providential care. That's why, instead of wringing our hands in despair, we clasp our hands in prayer.

Dr. Edward Hallowell a child and adult psychologist, and a former professor at Harvard, has made it a point to study worry and has written about it as well. Several years ago in a magazine called Psychology Today, he offered numerous suggestions for dealing with excessive worry, but finally he said this: "Spirituality is a very powerful part of the mind! Talk to God when you feel worried.... Brain scans and EEG monitors show beneficial changes in the brain during meditation and prayer. These changes correlate with most measures of improved health, including longevity and reduced incidence of illness."

In today's world, many people are too weak to handle anything more than one day at a time. As human beings we are aware of this, but as Disciples of

Christ, we also know that we can safely trust that the Father who loves and cares for us today, will be there with that same love and care for us tomorrow. Good words for us to hear and remember as we prepare to celebrate Thanksgiving! As his disciples let us live joyfully, and thankfully, each and every day under the loving care of our father who holds this day and every day in his powerful and providing Hands. Our first concern should be to live and remain in God's Kingdom. –letting the Father in heaven rule our lives completely, letting God help us through our worries, and allowing him to use us as his servants. Amen.