

March 2      No More Worries

Matthew 6:25-33

Whenever I read this scripture a scene from the movie Lion King pops into my mind. It is where Simba, after leaving Pride Rock thinking he was responsible for his father's death, runs into Timon and Pumbaa. They ask him to join their group and they sing "Hakuna Matata", a Swahili word that means "no worries." It is their motto. They plan to go through life not worrying about a thing but also not being responsible to or for anything. Live for the moment. Too often, when we hear this saying of Jesus that is what it feels like he is telling us to do. Don't have a care about anything. Live only for the moment and it seems so irresponsible that we reject it.

Also, for those of us with huge responsibilities these words by Jesus seem to be a rejection of our well founded fears. Let's be honest, we all worry at times and we don't want to be told this is wrong. Think about some of those times of worry. When a loved one is sick we worry. When the medical bills mount up and the bank balance goes down, we worry. It seems like Jesus is condemning us for those worries but we also know Jesus loves us, wants us to bring to him all of our feelings, including our worry and so we are confused. What are we to do with this passage of scripture?

The first thing that this passage shares is that God cares. This is a point that Jesus makes in several ways. When he talks about how God takes care of the birds of the air and clothes the grass of the field and such, this as a reminder that God cares about us and we have visible proof from nature concerning that care. So when we are struggling with some of the challenges of life and we start wondering if God really cares about our situation God would just have us look outside. In seeing the birds, the wild flowers and all the rest Jesus says, is to be reminded of how much God loves and cares about us. Reminders like this don't take away the problems. It might not even take away the worries. But it does take away the feelings that we are in this all alone. We know God is with us, God loves us, and God cares.

I recall a story about a man who was dealing with the impending death of his wife. She was in hospice and the doctors told him it was only a matter of days. His

family had all come and it was a beautiful spring day. His five year old granddaughter asked him to take her for a walk. The family encouraged him to get outside for a few moments. In their brief stroll his granddaughter became enthralled in watching a wooly caterpillar. As they bent low to watch it together and she stroked it gently with her finger he wrote how a calm came over him. He recalled this passage of scripture and realized that if God could create and care about a caterpillar that brought his granddaughter such joy, he would be o.k. in the weeks ahead. Jesus hopes you remember that God cares and in that knowledge you can release some of your worries.

There is also in these words of Jesus an emphasis on us focusing on God instead of stuff. There is a subtle thing going on here that we sometimes miss. We think Jesus is saying don't worry about having something to eat or something to wear. All of us think, "Well that is impossible." If we were starving, we would worry. If we had nothing to wear except the rags on our back, we would worry. But this is not what Jesus is saying. He says. "Don't worry about what you will eat, or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear" To put it in words we can more readily understand Jesus is saying people spend way too much time worrying about whether to have beef, or pork or vegetarian for dinner tonight. Or people spent way too much time in their closets this morning worrying about what they should wear to church today. This is a lot different from worrying when there is no food in the cupboard or refrigerator and you wonder if you will eat. The same would go for clothes. Jesus says put God first and then other things begin to sort themselves out.

When we are honest with ourselves we all have given into worrying about non-important things. It might not be about clothes or food but might be about how our house looks in comparison to the neighbors, or our car or... You get the idea. This is the kind of worry that Jesus says we need to work at eliminating from our lives. It is unproductive and self-centered.

We are challenged to trust in God. Jesus tells us that when our focus is there and we are continually reminded of God's care then we begin to have the anxiety level go down no matter what we are facing. Also, when we are not focusing on stuff, food and clothes and homes, but the important things of life it frees us up, somehow. It helps us

gain perspective. When we trust that in God we have what we need for today it is an empowering kind of feeling. In another place it says, "Worry won't add a day to your life." Doctors today will tell you that it will probably decrease it. So we are challenged to let go of the non-important things we worry about and focus more fully on God.

A young person wrote about this freeing power. She writes about how all through high school and the first couple of years of college she was always worried about her appearance. She would get up extra early each day to make sure her clothes were just right and her hair was perfect. She admitted to sometimes trying on as many as five different outfits before she was satisfied and ready to face the day. She was always anxious that she was not dressed just so. Any kind of criticism about her appearance crushed her. Then between her second and third year of college she was invited by her church to go on a month long mission trip to Africa to help in an orphanage and build a school. She almost didn't go when she was told the weight limit of her luggage and that there was no need to take curling irons and hair dryers because there was no electricity in the village. Also, everyone was asked to take as little as possible, including makeup, so they could fill their bags with things for the children. She went and on getting there heard that there was not even running water and that she would likely get to wash her hair once a week! Yet she fell in love with the kids. She was dirty and disheveled and, she realized, loved. These kids did not care what she looked like. They just cared about her. Upon coming home she had changed. She decided that she was going to wear what she wanted to school. She wasn't going to worry about making sure her hair and makeup was just so. If people criticized her she decided it would be their problem. She was writing from Africa where she had returned as a Peace Corp volunteer. Part of what she was saying was how freeing it was to her to no longer live under the tyranny of what others thought. Instead, she focused on the important things, her faith, her family, her schooling and her friends. The rest would get sorted out.

I don't know what each one of you is facing today. Some of you have real legitimate worries. What you are facing is immense and scary. Don't be ashamed of those worries and know that God cares. Focus on that love and see what God is making available today to you to get you through today. Through the love of God, the help of

friends and the support of your church you will get through today. Then you can worry about tomorrow when it arrives. You have what you need. See how God is at work and celebrate.

But there are those other worries. We all have our list of things that are not really important but cause us anxiety. This is what Jesus wants us to confront. He was particularly concerned about our anxious worrying about things. I think we could almost say that what Jesus was talking about is not being anxious. Worries, legitimate worry, God understands, anxiety over the little stuff that we give too much importance too, not so much. When we let go of these fears and trust in God we will live more fully. Whenever we quit worrying about the “what ifs” we do better.

I love how Jesus ends this passage. He says don't worry about tomorrow, it will have plenty of its own troubles. Just deal with today! And when you focus first on God the rest of today's issues will get sorted out.