

January 1 - We Are Worried

Matthew 6:25-34

I have to admit that sometimes words from the Bible seem less than helpful, at least at first glance. This passage from Matthew is one of those. We are told by Jesus not to worry. Then when we find ourselves worrying about things we feel guilty about it. It is as if we are not being faithful. What to do? Believe it or not this passage, once you dig deeper into its message, helps us when we are worried.

Why are some of us worried as we begin a new year? On January 20th we will see Donald Trump inaugurated as president. He bills himself as “unconventional.” This is why some voted for him and why others voted against him. From the day of his election we have been hearing, “This is uncharted territory.” Whether this is good news or bad is up to you to decide. This much is certain. When there is uncertainty in our lives it always causes worry. It is how we are wired. We don’t like the unknown.

Perhaps you are saying, “I’m not worried.” Then perhaps one of these other synonyms for worry describes what you are feeling as we begin 2017: anxious, perturbed, troubled, bothered, concerned, upset, distressed, or distraught. Do any of these terms express your feelings? Again, I need to remind you. When I am talking about being worried I am not talking against Donald Trump. I am talking about the deliberate air of uncertainty or newness that his transition has fostered. It has an effect on us, our economy and the world.

Beyond any concerns about the Trump presidency there are other worry producing things that might be impacting our view of 2017. Some of you are dealing with health issues. These make the days of 2017 very uncertain. You really can’t plan anything until they are resolved. Others of you are dealing with family issues that have caused and are continuing to cause disruptions and sometimes keep you up at night as you ponder their possible implications. Perhaps you or one of your family is experiencing financial problems. Things will have to be resolved sometime this year. Yes, there are many things that can and do fill us with worry. How do we deal with them

as people of faith, especially when we hear words from Jesus that seem to condemn worry?

We need to understand that Jesus was not condemning all sorts of worry. He realized that this is part of what it is to be human. Think about what he said to the disciples just before his arrest. These are words that are frequently read at memorial services. "Don't let your hearts be troubled, believe in God, believe also in me." Another way of saying this is, "Don't worry, trust God and trust me." When we are filled with worry, and we will be at times, we are also called to trust.

Jesus, in the scripture we shared, was condemning the worry we sometimes have concerning the superficial things of life, what we should wear or what we shall eat. It wasn't addressing survival issues such as, "There is no food in the pantry, what am I going to do?" Frivolous, self-centered or focused worry is the emphasis here. And we are all guilty, at times, of this kind of worrying. We wonder if what we have is in style, whether our friends still like us because we haven't gone out to eat for a month, and so the list goes on. Jesus was saying, "Don't spend time and energy on this kind of thing."

But when the worry is about bigger issues we are reminded to trust. One of the ways to build trust and be supported in these difficult times is through the gift of community. The disciples after the death of Jesus gathered together to support one another. Paul and Silas when they were in prison spent time together in worship and prayer. Community and faith are important at times of uncertainty.

Think about what you are worried about. If it is the state of the country following the election, perhaps you spend time with others who feel the same way planning for the next election. If it is concerning health issues, you let friends and family know about it so they can be praying for you and support you. If it is a family issue, perhaps you get into a support group. And always, pray about it. Knowing others care, have been through what you are going through, or feeling the way you are feeling and keeping you in prayer is how you can deal with worry and build trust.

Trusting in God and believing that God is with us should also move us from worry to action. I recall the story of Annanias. He had fled to Damascus because of the

persecution of the early church in Jerusalem. Saul had been one of the chief protagonists. They had heard that he had been blinded on the way to Damascus to arrest the faithful. I am sure most in the church saw this as a divine act of salvation. Now Annanias had been told to go and heal Saul. He had questions and doubts. Would he be putting his life on the line? Even with all of his doubts he followed God's directions and went and healed Saul, now Paul. Believing God was in the moment, he set aside his doubts. Moving forward in faith is part of how we show our commitment to God.

We are called to be agents of change. Jesus came to call us to transform the world, to let his message of love and peace triumph. This has always been the call of faithful Christians. No matter who was elected this is still our highest calling. If we are for Trump we must figure out how we best support his policies yet still challenge him where his actions do not match our highest ideals. And they won't. I say this not as a put down of him but as a historian who realizes that no presidential term has been totally focused on the highest ideals of our faith. We get better as a nation and world only as we hold those in leadership accountable.

If we voted against Trump then we need to do more than just sit and wring our hands and complain. We need to become politically active fighting for what we believe God would have us do. This is, after all, what a democracy is all about.

Action is always a remedy to deep worry. I see people more at peace once they understand what the matter with them is medically and what the plan forward looks like. The unknown is what causes the most worry. Now that they have a plan, even though the future is filled with uncertainty, they are ready to move forward. I see people dealing with family issues in a healthier way and they are much more at ease once they have a plan. It might not be the best plan or it might be the first of many different plans as life changes, but having a plan gives them something to hang on to and it decreases concern.

Community and action help build trust. Ultimately, it is about living each day fully in God's love. I love how this passage ends: "Don't worry about tomorrow. Each day has enough problems all on its own!!" It is a call to live in the moment in faith. This doesn't

mean putting your head in the sand and ignoring what is going around. It isn't against planning. But it is a reminder that ultimately, all you have control over is your responses right now to what is happening. Worry happens when you let your mind wander to the "would of, should of, could of" side of life.

I recall a time I was concerned, okay I'll be honest, I was worried about a lot of things. I had a preacher friend and I poured it all out to him. He smiled when I had unloaded my worries, and yes telling someone helps, and said, "Now how is that worry going to change things?" I looked at him puzzled and said, "What do you mean?"

"You are worried, and I get that," he said, "but worry never accomplishes anything. Is there one thing you can do today about any of these concerns?" After thinking I realized that I had done what I could about them and no there was nothing more I could do at the moment. He said, "Then give them to God and focus today on what you can do!" Worry is pointless when it paralyzes us. It is then we have to give it to God in trust.

So yes, we have worries concerning the year to come. They may be political, societal, health, family or other. Remember to not hold them in but reach out to a loving community, a supportive one. Figure out what actions you can accomplish and finally leave the rest with God in trust. Jesus' call to trust instead of worry was and is still good advice. Trusting in God; will it cause the problems to go away? No. Will it move us forward in faith, in action, in commitment? Yes. That is ultimately what we want. It was why Jesus challenged us about certain kinds of worry. Trust in God should be our motto throughout the coming year.