

DON'T WORRY, DO SOMETHING

Genesis 1.1 – 2.3

Romans 8. 18-25

Matthew 6. 25-34

I speak to you in the name of † the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

‘Do not worry.’ When our Lord said these words, he did not mean for us to be thoughtless or careless; and he certainly was not suggesting a reckless approach to life. His desire for his disciples then – as it still is today – was that we can live in a trusting and loving relationship with God.

But for many people, *not worrying* seems almost impossible. We worry about the weather; we worry about the economy; we worry about the future; we worry about finances; we worry about security; and we worry about the health and safety of our loved ones. We also worry a lot about ourselves, too: whether we will put on weight; whether we will grow bald; whether our good health will continue. The list seems to go on and on. Plainly and simply, Jesus tells us, ‘Do not worry’; but we do it anyway. It’s in our genes. It’s as if we were born to worry.

Some, of course, are better at it than others. In my previous experiences with churches, I’ve known people who could qualify as professional worriers. You may be one of them. They watch the news and hear about a storm brewing somewhere off the coast of Bangladesh, and they wring their hands and worry themselves sick over it. By the time the storm has passed, there is something new for them to worry about; and, if not, they begin to worry, because they don’t have anything to worry about!

If we’re not careful, worrying can become a way of life. Curiously enough, it gives some people a false sense of importance, as if to say that, by worrying, they are

somehow making a difference. I'll have more to say about that in just a moment. For now, however, let us be clear: Christ tells us in our gospel passage not to worry.

It's not the first time we've heard this. The admonition not to worry echoes throughout the pages of Scripture. For example, in his epistle to the Philippians, St Paul says, 'Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (4. 6-7). The Psalmist writes, 'Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you' (55. 22). And the prophet Isaiah quotes God by saying, 'Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand' (41. 10). This last verse has brought me much comfort in various difficult situations I have personally faced in my life; but I could go on and on. The Bible is filled with promises about God's faithfulness and encouragements not to worry.

So we are taught not to worry, but we do it anyway. The question becomes, 'what can we do about it?' I would like to make three suggestions.

Firstly, we can expose worry for what it is: it is a meaningless activity. Worrying is like atrial fibrillation, where the muscles of the heart race wildly, but do not pump blood like they are supposed to do. They go through the motions, all right; but they don't accomplish anything. You and I are kept alive by the muscles of our hearts contracting and expanding in such a way as to pump blood efficiently. Just moving the heart's muscles back and forth will not get the job done.

In somewhat the same way, stressing out over a crisis may give us a *feeling* of contributing something, but it actually does not accomplish anything. Worrying is a

waste of time, and calling it *what it is* may be a first step towards fulfilling our Lord's command not to worry.

The second suggestion is to make a clear distinction between worry and concern. Just last month, Claudia and I were watching the evening news and learnt that a massive avalanche of snow had suddenly covered a hotel located in central Italy, in the Apennine mountains. The hotel was literally buried under snow that was five meters deep. When it was announced that a number of families (with parents and young children) were amongst the guests of the hotel, of course we were worried. We wondered if anyone would survive: the temperatures were below zero, and the Italian rescue workers were severely limited in their access to the hotel because of the snow cover. As the days went on, 29 guests at the hotel were reported dead; but another eleven (including five children) were saved, thank God.

If I'm honest with you, I cannot say to you that my 'worrying' about those poor Italian families made any difference. But my *concern* led me (and others) to pray for them; and *concern* for those families' safety motivated the rescue workers to work around the clock to rescue the survivors. There is a difference between worrying and concern; and it is that concern leads to *action*.

If we find that we are worried about something, especially something that is personal and closer to home than an Italian avalanche, we might do well to ask ourselves, 'How can I convert my worry to concern, and use my concern to do something concrete and practical?'

And there is a third suggestion. This suggestion is inspired by Jesus's last command in our passage: 'Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well'. A whole sermon could be preached on this

one phrase; and I am certainly not going to say that ‘striving’ for the kingdom of God is an antidote for worry.

It seems to me that if we want to *seek* the kingdom of God (and I like that translation better) and his righteousness, then one of the first things that we can do it to have a *thankful focus* in life and faith. We start by thanking God for who he is; and we remind ourselves that he is continually seeking to be in relationship with us and to care for us.

The biblical view of ‘being thankful’ is not so much about ‘feeling grateful’ for things, or for particular blessings; it is rather a way of looking at life. It is acknowledging that God is the centre of all that we are, and all that we can be. Our relationship with God is the most essential relationship in our lives; and it is a relationship that changes how we look at everything.

If we are tempted to worry (and we will be), we might consider replacing that worry with a thankful focus. As we do this, we purposefully stop and recognise that God is first; that he is in charge of our lives; that we depend upon him for all that we are, can be, and have. We remind ourselves God cares more for us than he does the birds of the air; and that he will not leave us alone or let us perish. He loves us and is with us. This focus – this affirmation of what is in fact *eternal truth* – may save you and me from many sleepless nights and anxious moments. If we can learn to live this way, and deal with our worries this way, our lives will be considerably enriched. Don’t worry, do something!

Amen.