

Why worry ?

27 2 11

Almighty God,
you have created the heavens and the earth
and made us in your image:
teach us to discern your hand in all your works
and your likeness in all your children.

My text today is Matthew chapter 6 and verse 25, 'Do not worry about your life.'

In the past four Sundays in our run up to Lent, the gospel passage has been taken from Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount. Today, we move on to focus on a theme that concerns us all – worry.

At present, there seems so much to worry about. There is political upheaval in parts of the Arab world. There is a considerable threat of terrorist acts by extremists whose world view is rooted in a fundamentalist form of Islam. There are siren voices warning us of climate change. Economies are in the doldrums after the unchecked, reckless speculation by those involved in banking and finance. People's jobs are at risk. People's lives are at risk. Young men are more ready to commit suicide than any other group in society, despairing of their prospects for the future or of their individual sense of self-worth. And here our text today is advising us not to worry – sensible or silly or what?

The advice is clear, unambiguous – ‘don’t worry’. But worry about what? For a start, ‘life’ in general. But the advice soon becomes specific – don’t worry about ‘what you will eat or what you will drink or about your body what you will wear’. Food, drink and clothing – three basic essentials of our everyday life. There are hungry people in the world but it is unlikely any of us literally has to go hungry. There may be a problem about people drinking too much alcohol but here the drink referred to in Matthew is water and again here in the West water is readily available on tap. And clothes ? Well no one has to go about in rags. True designer clothes in Dinar shops are expensive but it is possible, thanks to a booming Chinese economy now officially the second largest in the world, to purchase ridiculously cheap clothing.

Jesus cites two examples to support his advice not to worry about food, drink and clothing: the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. They are part of the natural world; neither work to live but God cherishes the one and has created the other with a natural beauty to outshine even King Solomon in all his ‘glory’. Yet however beautiful the flowers of the field are, in the sight of God, people are worth so much more. So if God cherishes the brief beauty of flowers and birds then surely he will also cherish us even more so.

It’s all a question of trust, of faith in God who loves us and seeks our good. Earlier, Jesus observes sharply that worrying will not, cannot, add a single hour to our lifespan or if you prefer the Authorised Version make us taller. Instead, worry is seen as a needless distraction and that our focus should be elsewhere beyond our immediate needs, beyond what is needful. The climax of the passage is this:

‘But strive first for the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.’ So the advice is clear – don’t be preoccupied by immediate needs but occupy yourself instead with things that truly matter: establishing a well ordered society informed by God’s principles. If we are all looking out for each other, then the needs of all will be cared for. The active practice of such selfless principles is the best way to guarantee that individuals are cherished by society as a whole.

The passage ends with this recap of Jesus’ teaching. ‘So do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today. What Jesus is clearly telling us is not to worry. Live in the present, work in the present and don’t be distracted by the uncertainties of the future. Let today’s trouble be enough for today for as the King James Bible says so memorably: ‘Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.’

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew’s Dinard

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H: Sermon 23: Why worry

