

Sermon for August 18, 2019, Worry
Ps. 23; Luke 12: 22-31
St. Andrew Presbyterian Church
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Faith, Not Fear

In the introduction to Ps. 23 this morning, we heard that we need to be *reminded of* the comforting and loving promises in that well-known scripture. Why? Why would we forget those words? Because we are a people who often forget what we've heard, and what we've learned, and what we know, much to our misfortune. A church member once told me that the sermons that most spoke to him were the ones that reminded him of something he already knew. As followers of Jesus, we are a people who are called to remember.

The word "remember" has always interested me, perhaps because my name, Rosemary, means "remembrance," which is rather ironic considering how forgetful I am. "Remember" is not only a powerful word, but a powerful action. When we remember someone or something, we are actually "re-memorizing" it; that is, we are putting the pieces of the past back together in order to see something again. We are making something whole.

Just think of some of the pleasant memories we have. We may like to remember childhood Christmases, or first pets, or wedding days, or special vacation moments, or the birth of a child or grandchild, or the face of someone we love. When we remember those occasions, we can see the whole event again. The flip-side, of course, is that we can also remember not so pleasant times. Either way, we have the God-given ability to make past events whole and real again by putting them back together or bringing them back into focus.

Jesus knew the power and importance of remembering. Not only did he tell his followers many times to remember God, but his final command was "to remember" him in the breaking of the bread: "Do this in remembrance of me." Ours is a faith based on remembering. When we partake of the bread and cup at the Lord's Table, we re-member that love-sacrifice of 2000 years ago, so that we don't forget the gift of grace, what it cost, and how we are to share it with others. When we hear the gospels proclaimed each Sunday, we re-member once again who Jesus is and who we are called to be. We bring Christ back into focus, along with his call to us. *Forgetting is what gets us in trouble.*

Yet how easy it is to forget, as has been pointed out in the gospels the past two weeks. We've heard what happens when people forget that all their material possessions and financial planning cannot save them from death or what happens

when they forget to be prepared, to keep their lamps lit, and remain ready to do Christ's will. Jesus' words sometimes can seem beyond our reach or the effort of remembering. Yet, *forgetting is what gets us in trouble*.

Let me ask, are there any worriers here this morning? I wonder if it is even humanly possible NOT to worry. Just pick up the morning's headlines, or listen to the news, or take a glance at your "to-do" list, or imagine yourself on the Pastor Nominating Committee, or find out the situation behind each name on the St. Andrew prayer list. How are we NOT to worry? And to add to our worry, we even worry that we worry since Jesus told us NOT to worry.

Obviously, we are not alone in our worries or Jesus wouldn't have preached this message two thousand years ago to the crowd of people who followed him. I would guess, though, that their worries were more warranted than ours often are; some of them really did wonder where food for the family would come from. Many of them did worry if they would be able to clothe themselves or their children. Many of them did worry about living under the occupation of a foreign people whose laws—God's or Caesar's—they had to choose to follow. Yet Jesus still said, "Do not worry about your life," even to them.

I began thinking about Jesus and the examples in scripture where he worried. After all, he was human, right? Just like us, right? Take, for instance, the time he was twelve years old and was separated from his parents for three entire days in the big city of Jerusalem. We might think a kid would panic, but it was his parents who panicked, instead. When Mary finds him, she says, "Your father and I have been searching for you in *great anxiety*" (Lk. 2:48) to which Jesus calmly replies, "Why? I've been right here in my Father's house."

Or, consider the time that Jesus was at Peter's home where he had been healing scores of people all evening long. The next morning, he got up early and went to the garden to pray. We might think Jesus would be worried about all the people who would show up at the door, expecting something from him. But instead we find the disciples anxiously searching for him, *hunting* for him, as Mark puts it, and when they find him, they urge him to get up and do some healing. What is Jesus' response? Does he worry about what other people think of him or what his disciples' expectations are? No. Jesus simply informs the disciples that it is time to move on to the next town.

Wouldn't we perhaps worry if our family publicly proclaimed that we were crazy and that they didn't acknowledge us? Who would support us? Who would love us? Where could we go? But in response to the rejection by some of his family, Jesus looks at the crowd and says, "Anyone who follows me is my father and mother, sister and brother." Case closed.

We also have no indication that Jesus worried and wondered if the twelve people he called to be his close companions would refuse him. He simply says, "Follow me," with no pleading, no bribery, no coercion. And when others, like the rich young man, decide not to go with him, to leave him, Jesus doesn't worry about his self-esteem or effectiveness; he doesn't chase the young man down and beg him to change his mind. He allows the young man to leave.

When parts of the crowds cannot accept what Jesus teaches, he doesn't pace the floor and wring his hands because of their rejection. We have no record of his huddling with his disciples and nervously wondering what he should say next to appease the Pharisees and Sadducees. When Jesus himself is struck on the cheek, instead of worrying about what would come next, he responds, "If there is some offense in what I said, point it out; but if not, why do you strike me?" Jesus always chose response instead of reaction; clarity instead of confusion; and compassion instead of worry because he knew what he was about: striving for God's kingdom.

As far as I can tell, the closest experience Jesus had with worry was in the Garden of Gethsemane. He knew what was awaiting him—a rigged trial, abandonment, torture, and a prolonged and brutal death. Who wouldn't worry? The disciples certainly could not handle the anxiety, so they either took a nap or fled. But Jesus *remembered to remember* that life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. He remembered to remember worrying cannot add a single hour to the span of life. He remembered to remember that the Father knew what he needed, and Jesus remembered to remember, because he knew Ps 23 as well as any of us, that God restores the soul, that it is faith, not fear, that matters. After uttering the words, "Thy will be done," Jesus walked through the final hours of his life with an even, quiet, calm grace.

"Do not worry" does not mean do not be concerned or interested or lovingly aware. Do not worry does not mean do not do anything. The sparrows don't sit on their wings and wait for God to put worms in their mouths or find twigs for their nests. The lilies don't stay underground waiting for God to pull them up into the sun. The difference between getting mired in the worries of life and in living life is how we respond. Jesus tells us what that response should be and what to do in the face of worry: strive for the kingdom of God and God's righteousness. Strive. Practice. Pray. Move. Act. Reach out. Share the good news. Build the kingdom.

The "sin" of worry is that it often turns us away from God, not towards him. We ignore the opportunity for building God's kingdom and for receiving the promise of God's righteousness instead of striving for them. When we are ensnared in

worry, we are, in effect, saying we don't trust God's providence. We shut our eyes to the blessings around us, the roof over our heads, the loving concern of others, and the call Jesus extends to us. When we worry, we don't believe that the God who made us will provide for us, at least not the way we want him to. When we worry, we, in fact, make ourselves the object of our worship instead of God and ourselves the objects of our care, instead of others. We so drain ourselves with worry that we have nothing to give anyone else. How can a kingdom be built, how can the church grow, how can the Word be shared, how can the hungry be fed, how can the naked be clothed, how can the oppressed find freedom, when we've given all our energy to worry?

What are we, then, to remember today? Jesus points us to the most important response: Strive for the kingdom of God and the other things *will be* taken care of. We need to be like the lily and be like the birds. The wildflowers of the field do God's will merely by pointing their beauty to the sky, and the birds do God's will merely by flying through the air. If flowers and birds can do God's will, which is to go about the business of living, shouldn't we, since we, unlike the flowers and birds, are said to have been created in the image of God? May Christ grant us faith, not fear; courage, not worry, to leave this place today with trust in him and the resolve to be kingdom-builders.

Thanks be to God.