

Bethel - Treasure Series Commitment Sunday - October 28, 2018

Matthew 6: 25-34

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? <sup>27</sup> Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? <sup>28</sup> “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. <sup>29</sup> Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? <sup>31</sup> So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ <sup>32</sup> For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. <sup>33</sup> But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. <sup>34</sup> Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Don't Worry. It's Okay. It's Okay. It's Okay.

At a church meeting a very wealthy man rose to tell those present about his Christian faith. “I’m a millionaire,” he said, “and I attribute it all to the rich blessings of God in my life. I remember that turning point in my faith. I had just earned my *first* dollar and I went to a church meeting that night. The speaker was a missionary who told about his work, and what it meant to turn your life over to God. I knew that I only had a little, but I had to either give it ALL to God’s work or nothing at all.

So at that moment I decided to give everything I had to God. I believe that God blessed that decision, and that is why I am a rich man today.... because I it all to God.” He finished speaking and there was awed silence at his testimony. As he sat back down, a little old lady sitting in the same pew leaned over and said to him “I dare you to do it again.” ☺

My friends, we know deep down in our hearts that giving our things away does not buy us anything with God. Living generous lives does not buy us eternity, or magically gain us more wealth. And our series on Treasure this month has been based on passages from the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus is teaching about the connection between our giving, our living, and our *hearts*.

Jesus is attempting to draw us out of ourselves. Jesus is trying to help us move from constantly worrying about not having enough, into a life of peace , fully connected with

God. As we conclude our Treasure series today, as we hear the last few verses of Matthew chapter 6. This chapter began with the warning about not being able to have two masters, God and money. Jesus “wraps up his stewardship sermon,” so to speak, by instructing his disciples not to worry.

I want to share with you another story from Pastor Jacob Armstrong. He tells how one night, he and his family were traveling. It was late at night, after a long day, and they got stuck in a traffic jam on the highway. About this time, his two year old daughter Mary, decided she had had enough and went into to a fit—a real meltdown. Pastor Jacob related that he too had had enough, and was perhaps having his own meltdown. ☺ Am I the only parent here today who can relate?!??

As the car filled with the sounds of screaming and crying and toddler wails, Jacob’s wife calmly unbuckled their daughter out of her car seat, hugged her, rocked her, and repeatedly said It’s ok...It’s ok...It’s ok .... as two-year old Mary started to calm down, her mother redirected Mary’s attention by asking her...do you hear it? Do you hear it, Mary? She rolled down the window, and then they all quietly enjoyed the sound of thousands of crickets chirping in the night. Mary's breathing slowed down and Pastor Jacob's did too. *Shhhhhh it's ok. It's ok. It's ok.*

Now – here is where God really starts chuckling. We heard this story in a video during our Thursday night Bible Study. And about 12 hours later, on Friday morning, our family was scrambling to get out the door, (which is the norm most mornings,) but on Friday, Travis had an early meeting, so he left the house before 7am and I was flying solo. And our darling 3 year old James was having a hard time. He just wasn’t having it. Was it a full moon on Friday?? It certainly felt like it at the parsonage. I could hear some low level squawking coming from down the hall as I finished getting the twins dressed, but the volume and timber seemed manageable.

And then I walked back into his room. I see James thrashing on his bedroom floor. He refused to put on the outfit we had agreed upon the night before...he refused to put on any clothes at all. I tried all the typical modern, Dr. Spock type, parenting methods for handling toddlers that we “enlightened parents are supposed to use... reasoning, compromise, reward” But nothing was working and his screaming was eventually being matched by my shouting. A near miss from a thrown matchbox car was the final straw. I was ready for some Old Testament parenting - fire and brimstone was about to reign down!!!! And then I remembered the story from the video. I thought to myself, this’ll never work as I looked at my beautiful, precious, beloved, miraculous James contorting in a fit on the floor like an angry honey badger.... but hey, nothing else was working either, so I decided to give it a try.

I changed my tone, picked him up, held him in a hug, and repeatedly said It's ok. It's ok. I carried him over to the glider and just rocked back and forth and back and forth..... it's ok. it's ok it's ok. There were still a few kicks and screams at first, but then James did start to calm down. He put his head on my shoulder and whimpered. His body went limp. We worked out a compromise on the outfit and were out the door 5 minutes later.

It's a powerful thing to hear somebody who loves you tell you it's going to be OK.

And that's what Jesus says in today's scripture. Don't worry. It's going to be OK.

It's difficult not to worry. Family, finances, health, uncertainty about the future—all these cares can grip us so that we sometimes lose perspective. And there are certainly situations in our lives, where at least a bit of worry seems justified. We worry about people's safety in a world that includes terrorist attacks at concerts and schools and churches and synagogues. We worry about those we love when they get on a plane or train or drive their cars in the rain. We worry about big things. We worry about small things.

Last summer I spent a week in Boston at a continuing education seminar. I remember one afternoon I needed to go from the seminary at BU to a restaurant downtown. So, I flagged down a cab. I told the driver my destination, and I soon realized that his first language was not English. But as he drove, I watched on my GPS and I knew he was heading the right direction. I had some concern as he drove faster than I would have preferred, dodging traffic and pedestrians alike as he swerved here and there. As he talked on his cell phone, I never did figure out what language he was speaking. But he got me to my destination—all in one piece. I needn't have been concerned.

In the Gospel of Matthew, right after Jesus speaks about serving God alone, he says “do not worry.” As Pastor Jacob pointed out, when someone we care about, someone we love and someone who loves us, speaks the words “do not worry” it's powerful. We calm down. Worrying about a cab ride is minor league, compared to worrying about aging, or a job and job security, or whether we have a roof over our heads and something to eat. Yet, Jesus, in his conversations with his disciples, may have been inferring that worries in general, are ALL to be minor league, if our lives are centered on God.

One commentary put it like this *“In the context of the ministry of Jesus, the message of this part of the Sermon on the Mount may well have been directed to his immediate disciples who had left homes and families, to become, like Jesus, traveling teachers. These words represent a radical call to move away from cultural values into a life of trust*

*and obedience.*”<sup>1</sup> The disciples became as dependent on God’s providential care as the birds and the flowers. They depended on local hospitality as they traveled, through which God cared for their needs.

And God’s providence isn’t showered down from the sky, but through the hands and hearts of those who love God. There was once a boy without food and without shoes who made the proper answer to the cruel-minded woman who asked: ‘But if God loved you, wouldn’t God send you food and shoes?’ The boy replied, ‘God told someone, but she forgot.’” When the rest of us forget to share, it may be much more difficult for God to care for people’s basic needs & accomplish God’s work in the world.

In our short Gospel reading today, the word “worry” is used 8 times. It comes from a word that means to worry anxiously—to be preoccupied with, absorbed by, tormented with, distracted by worry. Jesus isn’t advocating a shiftless, thoughtless attitude to life, or never being concerned, or not thinking ahead, but to the kind of worry that can take over and preoccupy our lives.

Erma Bombeck tells the story of a little boy named Donald, who had many worries as he started school. “My name is Donald, and I don’t know anything. I have new underwear, a loose tooth, and I didn’t sleep last night because I’m worried. What if a bell rings and a man yells, ‘Where do you belong?’ and I don’t know? What if the trays in the cafeteria are too tall for me to reach? What if my loose tooth comes out when we have our heads down and are supposed to be quiet? Am I supposed to bleed quietly? What if I splash water on my name tag and my name disappears and no one knows who I am?”

My friends, we can “What If” ourselves to death. We can rush ahead to some conclusion that’s never going to happen, and make life very unpleasant for ourselves and for others around us. Yet we’re reminded that God knows who we are, and God cares about us, and asks us to be less distracted by worry and more convinced that our lives are in God’s hands. When we’re on the edge of a meltdown, hopefully we can hear Jesus say, “don’t worry.”

One final story from Jacob Armstrong. After the birth of his first child, Jacob was amazed, overwhelmed, exhausted...and worried. How would he and his wife Rachel care for this new life, entrusted to them?

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<sup>1</sup> Feasting on the Word

He remembers standing at the window of the hospital nursery, gazing at their baby, the weight of the world on his shoulders... and then he felt his phone buzzing, signaling a new voicemail. It was his friend Tammy. Her message was short and simple. 'Jacob, God is in control of that little girl. Her every breath in, and every breath out, are not your responsibility. Starting today, you have to entrust her to the God who knows everything she needs.'

Jacob said it was exactly the reminder he needed... And maybe it's the reminder you need too?

My friends, life is uncertain. Worry will come. When we look at our greatest treasures, we may feel anxious about caring for them. But Jesus says we don't need to consume our lives with worry, because God knows everything we need. The knowledge that God knows and cares for us, can sustain us through times of uncertainty and fear.

Jesus knew that if we take the energy and emotion we've been giving to our worries, and redirect them, we can move forward in a healthy productive way. God wants to be our highest priority. Jesus directs us to first seek God, and everything else will fall into place. One way to respond to what Jesus has said in Matthew 6 — one way to show that Jesus is our Master, and God is our Father, and we're not worried about the future — is to make a commitment to support the ministries of the church financially.

I hope many of you have brought with you today a Commitment card that you prayed over and completed at home. If you didn't, I hope you got one from the back table to complete this morning. In just a moment I'm going to invite you to bring your 2019 commitment card forward, and place it in our Treasure Box.

If you have never turned in a pledge card before - would you consider doing so today? These commitments are important to the church, yes, they help us to faithfully plan and prepare for ministries. But I believe they are so much more important for you, for me, for us as people of God.

I've heard that some people don't fill them out because they worry about not being able to pay in full. My friends, this isn't a binding legal contract. If you fall on hard times, the church will not kick you out for not paying your pledge. I feel a little silly saying that, but I think some people might need to hear it. If you fall on hard times, how much more valuable to know that your church family has pledged to uphold the church with their giving? That you are not in this alone. So do not worry. It's okay. It's ok. It's ok.

This commitment card is a reminder of your covenant with God to uphold the church, to participate in God's Kingdom work in the world. This card is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, signifying to all your trust in God's good promises. Your pledge to the church says that because you *believe*, you don't have to worry about the future.

What I hope you will do as you come forward, is not just set your card inside the Treasure Box and return to your seat, but pause to pray. Make this not just a financial pledge but a commitment to serve Jesus as Lord, and trust in God as the Giver of all Good Things. If you're here with your spouse or family, I hope you'll come down and pray together. And that means this may take a while, so be patient, take your time, and let's make this a significant moment of worship and commitment.

Our closing hymn is #593, Here I Am Lord. The altar is open while we sing. Will you please stand and join with me?

Let us pray: Holy God, Creator of all, Be Thou our Vision, For Bethel United Methodist Church of Forest Acres, we pray for Your guidance and Your strength. Send your Holy Spirit, to inspire us to re-form and deepen our hearts, that we might be rich in your grace and faithful in your call to give.

Almighty God, we have truly felt your presence among us today, as we have come together to re-commit our lives to you and your church. We are so in awe of your power, authority, and wisdom – all the ways we have seen and heard you in this very room. Lord, we ask that you would continue to encourage and challenge us to be your people. That you would so fill us with your mighty love, that we would be bold enough to share it with others. Use each one of us in the building up of your Kingdom here on earth.

Through Your Amazing Grace, help us to be who YOU call us to be... This we pray in your most holy name, the name of Jesus our Savior, Amen.