

WORRY

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai 26 February 2017

Matthew 6:25-34

[MW17-05]

Can any of you by worrying add even one hour to your span of life?

- so Jesus asks
and it's a good question
- can anyone do it? no?

Worry ... who here has not worried, ever???

- what sort of things do you worry about?
[space for answers]

Jesus says some thought-provoking things about worry in today's Gospel reading

- and I respond like this ...

Worry is illogical because it is futile, unproductive and pointless

- Jesus reminds us we cannot add anything to our life
worry can only subtract from our lives by causing things like ulcers or a coronary
and in fact most things we worry about never happen anyway\
- Sir Winston Churchill once said:

"When I look back on all these worries, I remember the story of the old man who said on his death bed that he had had a lot of trouble in his life, most of which never happened."

Worry is also inconsistent with faith

- faith and worry are like fire and water
faith means trust - trust in God's care and provision
- to be a Christian is to walk in a trusting relationship with God
to take seriously Jesus' words that our Heavenly Father
really does know and care about our every need
- even more, following Jesus gives purpose and direction meaning to life
so we don't need to worry about what the point of this life is
or what we need to do to find true happiness

When we face difficulties we really don't need to put energy into worrying

- when things are painful and difficult Jesus promises to walk with us
perhaps God will even use adversity to build our character\
- the result may be increased intimacy with God, greater spiritual insight
or far deeper faith with which to encourage and affirm others

Here's a quote from a preacher who says there are seven reasons not to worry:

Worry misses the point of life, is illogical, a complete waste of time, incompatible with faith, sub-Christian, unnecessary and contradicts common sense

However, even knowing and being assured of all that ...

- I don't know about you, but I still find myself worrying
"I tell you not to worry" says Jesus. "Don't worry!"
- now I am not sure if it is possible to stop worrying altogether
however it is possible to not let worry overtake us, sap our energy, divert us
and prevent us from experiencing the fulness of life

One way is to have these encouraging words of Jesus

- the promise that we are not alone
somehow absorbed into our life and being
- sounds a bit weird I know, so maybe I can explain it like this:

I had three major projects on the go with deadlines looming. One night it all seemed to be pressing in on me and I was struggling with how I was going to get everything done. I was lying in bed, not sleeping and worrying about it all when these words just came to me: "O still small voice of calm" - from a hymn we are going to sing later. Words which I can remember singing ever since Sunday School. Those words brought with them a sense of calm and of the presence of God ... which made all the difference.

- it is important these things "get in" so they can surface when most needed

How does all this and worry work in the real world?

- I introduced some of you to my "real bloke" last week and I thought I might do that again with this topic

A while back I felt I was being challenged to go beyond the theories and technical terms and high-sounding ideals of being a Christian. It was as if I was being told to 'get real with God'. To 'cut to the chase'; get down to earth, back to basics. Out of this, over a period of time, a series of stories has developed. Stories which are most definitely not 'straight theology' or Biblical scholarship – though I'm pretty sure that's all in there! Rather they are about a 'real bloke' who has the experience of God bursting into his life. This bloke is probably not a regular church-goer, but he and the Lord have some interesting conversations – and develop quite a relationship. Stories which deal with real situations, like this, which I've called: "A Sleepless Night"

For what seemed like an hour I'd been tossing and turning – afraid to look at the clock in case it confirmed how close to morning it was – and how much sleep I wouldn't get. Outside it was cold and stormy, but I was all hot and clammy. I needed to sleep but couldn't – not with all that stuff going round in my head.

Then I felt a tap on my shoulder. It was the Lord. You know, the Lord God, Creator of heaven and earth; Father of our Saviour Jesus Christ and all that.

"Can't sleep? What's on your mind?" he said.

You would think that the creator of all that is; the one who is all-powerful, able to be everywhere at the same time, would be able to manage a small thing like knowing what was bothering one of his creatures. But I've learnt the Lord's like that. Likes to ask questions and talk just like a regular person. I've also learnt to humour him when he does – which I guess is fair enough because there are plenty of things he has to humour us about.

So I said: "The car needs a clutch and four new tyres. The computer's on the blink and there's a huge dentist's bill hanging over our heads."

"That's a lot to worry about," the Lord said sympathetically. "I can sure understand why you're having trouble sleeping."

Now I really appreciated him saying that. Seems I remember reading in the Bible that the Lord wasn't quite so sympathetic to Job – a guy in a far worse situation than me. Job lost everything through no fault of his own and complained about it – with good reason I thought. But to him the Lord said something like: "You think you've got problems! Ever tried to run a universe!" As for me, I had to admit it did feel better just to get it off my chest.

"Listen to that," the Lord said.

"To what?" I asked.

"Listen!"

All I heard was the wind howling and the rain beating down on the roof.

"Roof leak?" asked the Lord.

"No."

"Any loose windows or doors? Broken panes?"

"No," I said again, puzzled.

"Who's that lying next to you?"

Now it seemed to me he was beginning to lose the plot - even if he was the Lord. "You know who it is," I said, exasperated.

"Humour me again," he smiled.

I sighed. "That's Patti, my wife."

"Do you love her?" he asked.

"Of course."

"Does she love you?"

"Uh. I guess." I hoped he wasn't going to suggest waking her up and asking her. True love can stand many things - but waking your wife up in the small hours of the morning to ask if she loved you might be just pushing things too far ..."

But the Lord, as he often does, had something else on his mind. "Move closer to Patti," he said.

"What?" I responded.

"Go on. Do it," the Lord said. "Move closer to Patti."

So I did. I moved till I was lying next to Patti. She snuggled closer and put her arm around me.

"There. That's much better," I thought I caught the Lord saying under his breath. "Now tell me," asked the Lord, "Who's in the next room there?"

"My sons. Brandon and Paul."

"Do you love them?"

"What a question. Of course I do! They're neat kids."

"Do they love you?"

"I suppose they do. We have a lot of fun together. Read them stories at bed-time. And we always hug goodnight."

"That's great. Just great," said the Lord. Then he asked another of those dumb questions. "What are you going to do when you get up in the morning?"

"Go to work of course! What's the point in asking all these stupid questions ..."

My voice trailed off as it began to dawn on me: a roof that didn't leak in the storm; a loving family; a job to go to ... sure I had problems, problems that were serious and wouldn't just disappear. However I had the most important things covered. I was beginning to see things in perspective.

"That's right," said the Lord giving my arm a gentle punch. "You've made it through difficult times before, and you'll make it through this ... one step at a time. Trust me, I don't think Job is the book of the Bible you should be thinking of. What my old mate Paul says in the Bible seems much more appropriate to me:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds. (Philemon 4:6-7)

"Remember," the Lord continued, "when you think you're the only one awake in the middle of the night with all those heavy thoughts going around and around - you're not: I'll be here."

"Uh. Yeah. Thanks," I said.

"I'm not going to say anything as simple and Pollyanna like as count your blessings," the Lord concluded. "But it sure seems to me that you've got a whole heap more going for you than against you!"

I nodded; which is not easy to do when your head's on a soft pillow and you're cuddled up to your wife.

Funny thing was, nothing had changed. The car still needed a new clutch and tyres; the computer hadn't miraculously been repaired; there was still a big dentist's bill. Nothing had changed, and yet everything had changed.

It was like instead of being confronted with an impassable brick wall, I could see few hand and foot holds - steps even. Light at the end of the tunnel so to speak - and it was most definitely not a locomotive heading my way.

"Now you're getting it," chuckled the Lord. "Remember I'm always nearby for a chat or a word of guidance or encouragement ..."

I didn't even bother trying to nod. My eyes were heavy and I needed to get some sleep. As I drifted off it seemed to me the Lord pulled up the covers and tucked us in ...

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The Message translation tells us:

If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers - most of which are never even seen - don't you think he'll attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you? ... People who don't know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met.

Let's take a moment or two to reflect

- time for reflection, then:

When we worry O God,

"Speak through the earthquake, wind and fire
your still small voice of calm."

Amen.