

Troubling Times Through Easter Eyes A Celebration of Earth Day

Matthew 6: 25-34

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

“So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.”

One of the things guests often mention about our worship space are its open windows. It is a reminder that what we do inside during worship is connected to creation around us. We can gaze outside, look at the trees. If we are lucky, we catch a bird hopping from branch to branch with a worm in its mouth. Or we look out and see the grass in the fields, clusters of yellow dandelions and white cloves poking through the ground. It’s Jesus’ invitation to us when we grow anxious: look at the birds and carpets of flowers covering the field. Notice how God cares for them. And if God cares so greatly for them, just imagine how much more God cares for you. “So do not be anxious,” says Jesus, “Let tomorrow’s worries be for tomorrow.”

Well, it’s easier said than done, Jesus! There is plenty to be worried about these days! Our world is anxious, and *we are anxious*. Who can think about leaving worries for tomorrow? Especially when it comes to the climate crisis which is causing increasing amounts of hunger, violence, poverty, social breakdown, mass migration and war. A couple years ago a reporter interviewed the old soviet leader, Michal Gorbachev. They asked him what he saw happening around the world with Brexit and the European Union breaking down. With borders tightening and nationalism rising around the globe. And with the nuclear arms race heads back to its starting gates. He said he sees a highly anxious world preparing for war. As the climate changes in an overpopulated world, it is causing many symptomatic issues. It is especially hard not to be anxious about our tomorrows.

Not to mention, there seems to be a level of perpetual everyday anxiety all of us are coping with, to varying degrees. Globally, one out of thirteen people are diagnosed with some form of anxiety. In the U.S. it is nearly one out of five. For our children, under the age of eighteen, it is one out of three! Some say it’s because we have these devices we are tethered to that inundate us with constant news cycles and are always buzzing with notifications. Others say it is

because there are too many choices and social pressures. Others even say it is because we no longer feel that we can trust the world around us. Oh, remember the days when mother used to let us ride around the neighborhood on our bikes for hours on end without worry. When we could walk home from school if we missed the school bus. Today, such a thing is ineffable! Yet, here we have Jesus saying, “Do not worry” but he obviously never had children or had his phone ding every time he got an email, or had to worry about the ice caps melting! We have to admit: there is plenty to be anxious about these days.

So why exactly does Jesus invite us to study the birds and the flowers? What is he doing? Maybe he’s reminding us that we too are creatures who belong to the Creator. After all, we are formed from the soil of the earth—which means we are intimately connected to the rest of creation. Maybe we’ve felt the connection before. Have you ever had an experience when you stood on the beach, rolled up your pants, and let the waves slide over your toes? The air tastes salty, the seagulls are squawking, the sound of the ocean roars; and the worries simply wash away. When we listen to people speaking of their experience, they use language like, “something released inside of me” or, “I felt connected to creation.” Perhaps it’s on a hike looking for wildflowers, or hearing the birds singing at the dawn of a fresh morning when we feel it. It’s so simple, but it is a powerful reminder: we are creatures who are connected to creation and who belong to the Creator. And if God cares greatly about the small things, just imagine how much more God cares about you. Perhaps this is what Jesus is doing when he points to the birds and the flowers?

But, the reality is there’s still plenty of hunger and poverty in the world. Not everyone’s basic needs are cared for. And the truth is, while looking to nature is a relaxing escape, it doesn’t fix the injustices in our world. Which is why there might be another piece to Jesus’ words we need to pay attention to. You see, when Jesus says, “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or what you will drink,” the “you” is plural. In other words, “Do not worry about all y’all’s life” because like the birds and the flowers you are hard-wired to be in community. When we get sick. When we get scared. When we are stressed out. At the end of the day we are a community who cares for each other. A few weeks ago, our Presbyterian Women’s Circle and our Mom’s Group got together for Saturday morning tea. What I kept hearing about the experience was an amazement about how these groups truly care for each other—women who have shared life’s highs and lows for decades; moms who share their worries over a glass of wine. We aren’t meant to go through worrisome times alone. It’s why after Jesus points to the birds and the flowers he tells us to seek this kind of community. He calls it the kingdom of God. And then invites us to seek this kingdom first and widen our circle of community by seeking justice for all creation and people.

There is no doubt in my mind that God cares a great deal for this church. Where kingdom people care for each other, and where kingdom people seek God’s justice. If we are going to continue seeking justice, then we are going to need reminders of who we are and to whom we belong. And it’s a good thing we have them. Just look to the birds of the air and the flowers of the field. And be reminded: if God cares this much for them, just imagine how much God cares for you.