

Sinking into Faith

Luke 12: 22-34

²²He said to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. ²³For life is more than food and the body more than clothing. ²⁴Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! ²⁵And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁶If then you are not able to do such a small thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? ²⁷Consider the lilies, 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. ²⁸But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, you of little faith! ²⁹And do not keep seeking what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. ³⁰For it is the nations of the world that seek all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. ³²“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³Sell your possessions and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

In retirement my father-in-law has taken up bird watching. He grabs his binoculars and his trusty bird book and sits out on the his porch observing the play and behaviors of the birds. In some ways it has become a meditative practice where he simply watches as the burdens of the world, at least for a moment, flutter away. Jesus tells us to look to the birds as a proof that God takes care of us as well. “Do not worry,” he says.

Do not worry? Is Jesus for real? Obviously there wasn’t a 27/4 news cycle when Jesus said these words. Nor was there a global pandemic. I doubt the ice caps were melting, hover parenting wasn’t a thing yet, and I’m pretty sure gas prices weren’t pushing four dollars! Not worry!? Some say the world hasn’t changed, but because of social media and the constant bombardment of troubling news, our awareness of the worries in the world has increased, but I’m not so sure that’s entirely true. Someone told me about a study researchers did in the 80’s where they measured elementary aged children’s cortisol levels, the primary stress hormone. They measured student’s levels on a regular school day as well as immediately after they had to do one of those nuclear war school drills—some might remember when the siren would blast, and we would get in fetal position with our hands cupped behind our heads—as if that was going to protect us or something. Well, they did the same test for children these days. They measured their cortisol levels during a normal school day and then immediately after an active shooter drill. Turns out, today’s children have cortisol levels which are higher on a normal day, than they had in the 80’s after a nuclear war drill. If that isn’t a health crisis, I don’t know what is. Add into the mix, the fractured political landscape, Covid-19, a creation crisis, unchecked violence, and a society which seems to be driving in reverse, and it’s no wonder we are overwhelmed and exhausted and anxious. I mean, come on, is Jesus for real?

But notice what Jesus is saying. He connects our worries with our basic needs: food, water, clothing. In other words, our basic need is the assurance that we are going to be okay. That life will be okay. So regardless of what externally occurs, internally we are grounded in knowing that we belong to God and to each other. That external circumstances do not get to define our existence or purpose or reality. And underneath everything there exists a hum of God's good pleasure in doing things for us, because all of creation belongs to its Creator. In Luke's gospel the word for pleasure here is *eudokēsen* and it shows up only one other time in our bibles. In the third chapter when Jesus appears at the River Jordan to be baptized. And as the dove of the Holy Spirit descends on him he hears what? "You are my beloved child, with you I am well pleased!" *Eudokēsen!* God takes pleasure in both who we are, as well as providing for us. It's incredibly difficult to get a sense for knowing we will be okay in today's world. But Jesus connects our worries with our needs and basically asks, "Did you forget who you belong to?" If so, just look to the birds or squirrels or flowers, and remember who you are.

So imagine: what might be different if we sank into faith in such a way where our worries aren't in control? It doesn't mean we'd never have worries, but we'd be free to strive for the kingdom instead, right? We'd be free to hang a Black Lives Matter banner. We'd be free to learn Spanish to welcome our neighbors. We'd be free to step outside of ourselves. I mean, how many times have we heard about worries stunting churches from doing kingdom things? How many times have our own worries kept us from doing kingdom things?

I learned something recently about our brains. Did you know: when we take in a new idea or perspective, all the information filters through the stem of our brain—the fight or flight reptilian part of the brain. The worry part of the brain. This is why our first reaction to something new is often defensive or resistant and we begin to worry about ourselves. Like when someone suggests supporting a new mission effort, or doing something we've never done before, or when your spouse one day suggests it's time to become vegetarians. We get defensive, and our knee jerk reaction is fight or flight. At least until the dust settles and we've had some time to think about it. It takes a while for the new thing to get to the frontal lobe of the brain where we can process the information rationally and with discernment and self-awareness. In a world which seems to be overreactive, how do we become thoughtfully responsive? And what might be different if we sank into faith in such a way where our worries weren't in control? We would be free to strive for the kingdom and its justice first.

Someone once said that we can always tell someone's faith based on how relaxed they are. In an overly anxious world, perhaps this is an area where the church can help—and you do. Trinity is a pretty relaxed place where we remind each other that we belong to God, and everything we do comes from trusting that God takes pleasure in us as well as in giving us what we need.

So strive first for God's kingdom, good people. And in those moments when we might be overwhelmed or anxious or prone to forget, just look to the birds, take a relaxing deep breath, and sink into the truth of who you are. Amen.