

Trust the Equipment (Consider the Lilies)

Luke 12:22-32

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A couple weeks ago, David and I snuck away for a few days in Vermont.

It was planned to be a pretty quiet few days,

a lot of reading, a little driving around to cheese farms,

maybe a little walking in the woods,

and then more reading.

And for one of us, maybe some poetry-writing.

That was the plan, anyway.

But the Sunday before we left,

Bonni-Kay and Richard Vesely led the early, 8:15 service here.

And in addition to sharing lots of thoughtful reflections on scripture and faith and life,

they also told a story of having recently gone zip-lining.

Up on a mountain in New Hampshire, they'd strapped on helmets and

harnesses and attached themselves to wires and gone zipping down the

side of the mountain.

"David," I said, "when we're in Vermont, I want to find a mountain and do that."

He said I was crazy. But I said that Richard and Bonni-Kay are two of the funnest people I know, and I wanted to be fun like them.

So in addition to going online and finding out where the best cheese farms were located,

I also checked out where the nearest zip line would be.

Couldn't have been any closer – kind friends were letting us stay in their

place at Okemo, and hey, Okemo mountain had a zipline!

You go way up and then zipline all the way down.

David said he'd stay at the bottom and pray for me.

So Wednesday morning of that week,

I showed up at the bottom of Okemo,

feeling, I must admit, faintly nauseous.

There were just two other people in that morning's group of zipliners,

who, strangely enough, were a dad and daughter from Fairfield.

And there were two cheerful guides.

They handed us helmets,
strapped us into harnesses,
and said, okay, out to the bus, up the mountain we go!
"That's it?" I said. "We don't do, like, a training lesson or something?"
"Piece of cake," they said, "Just do what we tell you to do."
And into the bus we went.
Up the mountain we went.
We walked across a wildly-swaying suspension bridge and stepped onto a
platform,
from which a wire ran down the mountain to another platform,
which was maybe 60 feet in the air. Maybe 70. Maybe 100.
I don't know.
It was clearly pretty darn high.
One of the cheerful guides went first,
and then it was my turn.
They attached me to a rope which was attached to the wire,
said, "Step off!" , and, tightly gripping the rope which held my very soul and
being,
I stepped off and went flying through the trees.
Here's the truth: I loved it.
I felt like I was 6 again, pumping my feet on the swings so I could get high
high high in the air higher than the treetops.
I felt like George of the jungle.
I landed with something of a thud on the second platform;
The dad and daughter came right behind me, looking equally exhilarated.
"Okay," said cheerful guideperson,
"For this next zipline, we like to do a little something we call
'Trust the Equipment.
Instead of hanging onto your rope for dear life when you step off the
platform,
we want you to jump right off,
arms wide open,
not hanging onto anything.
Trust the rope will hold you."
Just to remind you, this was the platform that was 60, 70, whatever feet in
the air.
"Wait," I said, "Seriously? I mean, like, seriously?"
"Yeah," he said, "and hey, you're first again, Alida."

"Don't worry. Trust the equipment."

Don't worry. I said to myself. Don't you worry.
And without giving myself a whole lot of time to think about it,
I threw my arms wide open and jumped off the platform, no hands.
This time I wasn't George of the jungle hanging onto the vine,
I was Peter Pan, flying with my arms and legs waving wildly.
Don't worry, trust, don't worry, trust, I said,
until the completely freaked-out part of my brain took over and I grabbed
frantically for the rope above me.

But still - I got a few seconds in.
A few seconds of not worrying.

That's the background I want you to envision as I take you now into our
scripture passage --
I want you to envision that cheerful guide standing on a platform
ridiculously high telling me, against all common sense, "don't worry."

Now take yourself back to the year, say, 32.
You're one of Jesus' followers, one of the disciples, let's say Bartholomew.
Bartholomew never gets as much air time as Peter and John and James
and them.
So you're Bartholomew, and you are really enjoying being with Jesus,
really, it's been great, it's been inspirational, you've seen healings and
crazy miracles.
And frankly up until recently it's been all sunshine and rainbows.
But lately, not so much. Lately, on the fringes of every crowd,
you've noticed people hanging out who aren't looking so friendly.
It's folks from the establishment,
the people with religious power, political power,
Scribes and Pharisees,
and you can see that they are starting to stir things up against Jesus.
And these are not the people you want to annoy.
So that's bad.
And then there are just the day to day hardships --
you're on the road all the time,

there are days when you don't know where you're going to sleep, what you're going to eat. Your robes are getting kind of tattered, your sandals have a hole in them.

Bottom line is -- you are worried. You're increasingly anxious.

So one day,

trekking along the road, you say to Jesus,

"Jesus, I gotta tell you, the other guys and me,

we're a little stressed. Have to think that maybe you are too.

I mean, how are we going to keep this up,

we have no hotel reservations for next week or the week after,

our shoes are getting totally worn out with all this walking,

and those Pharisees, those are really not people we should be messing with.

Just sayin'"

And here's what Jesus says to you, and to the whole bunch.

Direct quote now, Luke chapter 12.

"Do not worry about your life,

what you'll eat or what you'll wear.

Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?

Well, if you aren't able to do so small a thing as that,

why do you worry about the rest?"

And then Jesus turns and gestures to the field of flowers all around you, and he says,

"Consider the lilies, they are more spectacular than King Solomon in all his glory ever was.

If God so clothes the field, how much more will he clothe you? ...

Do not keep worrying.

Strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you.

Do not be afraid."

And then Jesus gives you a big smile, and he walks on.

So what has he just said to you?

"Don't worry. Trust the equipment."

He's the cheerful guide on the platform,

100 feet in the air,

and he's telling you

"don't worry. Trust the equipment."

Trust God. Trust me.
Quit your worrying."

People often ask David and me how we pick the scripture passages we want to preach on each Sunday.

Well, sometimes you pick a scripture 'cause you think it's something that everyone needs to hear.

And sometimes you pick a scripture 'cause you know it's what you need to hear.

This is one of those scriptures.

I find this scripture passage to be one of the most challenging Gospel passages there is.

Do not worry?

Are you kidding me?

Yesterday, while I was working on this sermon, I was also bidding a temporary farewell to my daughter

who was hopping in a car to head several hours north to go hang out for the weekend with Serbian friends she'd met in Bosnia.

So there I am reading this scripture over and over, while simultaneously chewing my nails with anxiety.

I yelled to David, "You can tell Jesus didn't have kids or there is no way he would say 'Do not worry.'"

"Great attitude for sermon-writing" he yelled back. "Maybe I should preach tomorrow."

It's not just college age kids that make me anxious, though.

I worry about all kinds of things.

I'm a basket case before the Appalachia trip --

I wake up in the middle of the night worried that I forgot to charter the buses, and 220 people will have to hitchhike to West Virginia.

Okay, that's a little irrational, but I also worry about reasonable things to worry about --

In fact, I've always kind of prided myself on worrying,

on being the person in the meeting who says "yes, but, what about this detail that you may be overlooking, and anyway how will this possibly work, and what if no one comes and what if someone gets mad?"

I've actually thought worrying gave me my edge:

you know, the amount of Maalox consumed is in direct proportion to the quality of the outcome.
Quite sure of that, I've been.

Henri Nouwen, the great Christian teacher and spiritual writer, talked about people like me in a wonderful little book he wrote about worry, a book called 'Making all things new.'

He wrote,

"The truth is we don't really **want** to stop worrying.

Worrying has become such a part and parcel of our daily life that a life without worries seems not only unrealistic but -- worse -- it seems dangerous.

Our worries motivate us to work hard, to prepare ourselves for the future, and to arm ourselves against impending threats.

Or so we think."

Against this, he says, comes Jesus' challenging, impossible, unrealistic command:

Do **not** worry.

And as crazy and tough as it sounds,

If you can listen to him, Henry Nouwen wrote,

if you can let go of worry,

your life **will** be made new.

And you will find not only peace but extraordinary freedom.

I have to tell you, I met Henri Nouwen, at Yale, a beloved teacher no longer with us.

He **exuded** peace; he had a serenity about him.

So it appears he knew he was talking about.

And he's right, he was right.

Worrying **has** become part and parcel of our daily lives.

Worry consumes us -- we are, in many ways, an anxious people.

I read that the word worry is from the same root as choke, strangle, like one of those nasty vines growing over your prettiest shrub --

and it can seem like this;

worry can hold us down, tie us up in knots.

So if a worry-filled life is at one end of the spectrum,
and if a life of peace, free from worry, is at the other end,
how the heck do we move ourselves in that direction?
How do we listen, and believe, the words of the loving guide
who stands there saying
Trust the equipment.
Don't worry.

How? By remembering what **else** Jesus said.
He didn't just tell the disciples not to worry.
He made them stop where they were and turn and look at a bunch of
flowers,
flowers that were growing wild in the fields they were walking through.
Look at these, he said, look at these lilies. Consider these lilies.
Are they beautiful or what?
Well, God made these, Jesus said. And if God cared this much about
decorating a field for you to see,
how much more does God care about you?

Jesus was saying,
if you can just take your focus off what's tying you up in knots
and look at what is beauty and what is blessing;
if you can quit thinking about what's beyond your control
and remember how much you are loved by an amazing God,
well then, you'll be okay.
Trust the equipment.
Let go and leap.
You'll be okay.
You're loved. And you are safe.

Earlier this summer I sat and had coffee with someone who is dear to me,
a young adult who was part of our youth ministry when she was in her
teens.
She was sitting with me to tell me about her journey through darkness to
light.
Her drinking, which had begun in high school, had worsened into college
and beyond;
she had used it, she said, to deaden her anxieties,

to give her false freedom from worry about who she was and how she fit in.
And finally she'd realized she needed help.
And like so many people, like so many in our church family,
it was a 12-step program that helped her remember
how much she is loved by an amazing God--
how much she is loved by ... Love.
She sat there across from me radiating peace,
and a joyful serenity.
She looked -- beautiful. Like a lily of the field.
What I can't control I give over, she said,
and I know that I am held by Love.

That's it, finally.
That's it. It's to give over what you can't control.
It's to step off the platform and know that you are held by Love.

Look at all this beauty, Jesus said, look at these lilies around you.
Now will you please leave the worry behind?

Trust the equipment.
Leave the worries right there on that platform and leap.
Trust that you are held
and you are safe
and you are loved.

It's a process. It's a process to get there,
to get to that place of freedom.
I told you -- I jumped off the platform with arms open wide
and two seconds later I grabbed the rope in sheer panic.
It's a process to get from worry to freedom.

But it can be done. It can be done.
Trust, says Jesus.
Look at the beauty and love all around you,
holding you up.
Trust.
And leap into God's arms. Amen.