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Date: January 24, 2021
Sermon: "What, Me Worry?"
Pastor: Rev. David Johnson Rowe
Scripture: Mathew 6:25-34

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.

Are you worried? Now, there's a stupid question for the start of a sermon! If I asked you that face-to-face, you'd probably say, "How long do you have?"

We're all worried. The new administration in Washington, four days old, they're worried. They get paid to worry. Fans of the four football teams trying to make it to the Super Bowl. They're worried. I'm going to Bratislava this summer if I have to swim. Alida is worried. There isn't one of us with a doctor's appointment on the calendar who doesn't worry. Or take a good thing: post-Covid, reopening of schools, businesses, travel, sports, Broadway, restaurants. The reopening of hope—even that has its worries. What will survive? What won't? What will be changed in ways we don't like? The risks. The costs. The worries.

The background of worry is what gives us today's Scripture, which opens with Jesus's silliest verse: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry."

I'm not saying Jesus is silly. I'm saying that telling a human being not to worry is a waste of breath. My guess is Jesus has two points. First, there's a difference between worrying and planning. The worrying to worry about is worrying that paralyzes us. People say, "I'm worried to death." More likely, we get worried to paralysis. We can't move, think, decide, do. We are just stuck. Planning is a strategy. Worry is a waste.

Jesus's point is wonderfully imagined. He says, "Who among you can add a single hour to your life by worrying? Maybe by planning. Maybe by willpower. Maybe by lifestyle changes. But worrying? Nope.

Jesus's point is stop worrying and start doing. He puts it, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and then . . ." things will fall into place. Then . . . there's a better chance for success. Then . . . well, as the Rolling Stones sang, "You can't always get what you want, but you know sometimes you just might find you'll get what you need." But for that to happen, says Jesus, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God," God's ways, God's priorities, God's thinking, God's plans.

I used to be a pastor in New York City at a time when everyone was always worried about crime. It was always on our minds. "Son of Sam" killed had two people in our neighborhood, which only added to our worries. So one night, during our Church's annual Church Fair, I had to run over to my office. I unlocked a dozen locks, walked in without turning on any lights, and there, over my shoulder, I see a man with a gigantic weapon about to kill me!

Being an outstanding athlete, I turned quickly and punched him square on the jaw. I could hear it crack as he crumpled to the ground. Quickly, I turned on the light, only to discover that I had punched out a mannequin, part of the Church Fair display for used clothing!

Worry does that to us. Imagined fears. Imagined enemies. Imagined battles. We see two people off in the corner, whispering. They must be talking about us. Someone disagrees with us politically. They must be unpatriotic. Something new and different is introduced into our lives. It must be a threat.

Worry, by its nature, makes us reach for the worst explanation, we make the worst assumption, we expect the worst results. So we end up fighting paper tigers and clobbering mannequins. Jesus's solution is to get our priorities straight *and* get those priorities straight from God, not from our spleen.

Last week I said we, each of us, we need to think through what is the heart of an American? The heart of a Christian? The heart of a citizen? What's at our core? Is it fear? Is it distrust? Is it anger? Is it worry?

I realized the other day we can seem a boring Church. All we talk about is love. All we do is love. Decisions are based on love. We've shrunk the Bible down to love, stealing quotes from Jesus about loving God, loving yourself, loving others, lovingly.

So much other exciting stuff in the Bible that we ignore. We ignore "If your child disobeys you, drag him before the elders. If he won't change, kill him." When Eutychus falls asleep during one of St. Paul's sermons, he tumbles out of a window to his death. Ananias and Sapphira lied to St. Peter and dropped dead. God blows up Sodom and Gomorra for not being nice to angels. God drowns the entire earth for not being nice to him. When Samson kills a thousand enemies, he goes out to collect . . . oh, never mind.

There's the snake-handling St. Paul, the murder of 500 clergy from another religion, the guy who dropped dead for touching a holy object too holy for him.

There's so much more drama than all this Church's "Be nice, do good, love, love, love." The only excuse I have is, well, we're right!, expressed in the love of Christ, shown by his love on earth in every way, all the way to the cross and beyond, that *is* the heart of the Kingdom of God. That's the heart of God, the heart of God's Kingdom, the heart of Jesus, the heart of this Church.

Jesus said of that Kingdom, "It's near," meaning himself (Matthew 3:2), and "It's within you," meaning us (Luke 17:21). That's the point of our contact. His ways and our ways are joined, bonded in love. That's how we know who he is. That's how he knows who we are.

If you're a big fan of a sports team, you know what it's like to go to a game. Everyone is wearing the team colors or sweatshirts or T-shirts, showing their pride, their allegiance. When my nieces were playing college soccer at Drew University, I went to one of their road games and started to sit in the stands and get comfortable. But the fans in the stands pointed at my Drew sweatshirt and told me, in a friendly way, "You don't belong here. You belong over there," and pointed across the field. They could tell I wasn't one of them. I was one of the other people. What do we present that lets everyone know where we stand . . . or sit?

As followers of Christ, our distinction is love. When Jesus says, "Don't worry . . . seek *first* the Kingdom of God," that kingdom, his kingdom is ruled by love, rooted in love. In this little Church on top of this little hill, that's our trademark.

A popular folk hymn—it's in our hymnbook—we've sung it a lot of times. It says, "They'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love, yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love." Sadly, there are people who run around doing bad things in Jesus's name, waving Jesus flags and Jesus signs, but frankly, if it's not loving, it's not Jesus-anything.

Now, what's this got to do with worry? Each of us, we only have so much time, so much energy, so much focus. You can waste it on worry, which gets us nowhere; or we can spend it on love, which, invariably, is constructive and motivating. Love isn't sulking. Love isn't whining. Love isn't blaming or complaining. Love is a force. A force is a power. Power gets things done.

I told you last week that I've got this book coming out in a year, about Jesus. I'm telling you that publicly, out loud, in person, and online to thousands of viewers so that I'll get it done and not worry it to death.

In reflecting on *My Jesus*, the Jesus I understand him to be, I reflect on various pop-culture presentations of Jesus on Broadway, in film, art, music: Broadway's "Godspell," "Jesus Christ, Superstar"; the great Italian movie, "The Gospel According to St. Matthew," Kazantzakis's "The Last Temptation of Christ." Alec McCowan's one-man play, "St. Mark's Gospel."

What struck me about all of these is that Jesus is too busy for anything but loving. He is full of energy, in constant motion, and incredibly focused. Perhaps we think he should have worried about being with lepers. He should have worried about being near demons. He should have worried about opposition and betrayal. He should have worried about being seen with bad people. He should have worried about appearances and public opinion. He should've worried about death.

But he didn't. No time for worry. No room in his schedule for worry. There was always somebody to love. Somebody to heal. Somebody to listen to. Somebody to help. Somebody to know. Always, somebody to love.

That always pushes worry into the corner where it can collect dust.

Today's hymn is "Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God."

*Seek ye first the kingdom of God
And His righteousness;
And all these things shall be added unto you.
Hallelu, Hallelujah!*

*Ask, and it shall be given unto you;
Seek, and you shall find.
Knock, and it shall be opened unto you.
Hallelu, Hallelujah!*

*Man shall not live by bread alone,
But by every word
That proceeds out from the mouth of God.
Hallelu, Hallelujah!*