

Put God First, Worry Second

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Throughout our lives we tend to hear don't worry in a variety of ways. Sometimes it might be, don't worry, be happy or Worry is wasted energy. I've also been hearing Hakuna Matata from my two year old, which means no worries for the rest of your days.

As human beings we all tend to worry one time or another.

We may worry about our children, our family, and our friends. We may worry about our finances. We may worry that we can't afford to put gas in our car or have enough for groceries.

We may worry whether or not we will fit in at school because we aren't wearing Hollister or because we don't have an I-pod.

As a congregation, we worry whether or not our programs are successful. We worry about offending others. And, we too worry about finances. We worry about being able to pay our monthly bills and our mortgage payment once the north wing is completed.

We all worry.

In our gospel text for today, Jesus tells us not to worry. Each time I read this text I think to myself, I wish I could. I wish it were that easy. I wish I didn't worry about things like I do. I also wish that as a

congregation we didn't worry like we do. We are all human and we will worry.

Even though Jesus talks about not worrying in this text, there is a larger issue at stake. That issue is stated in verse 24 – “You cannot serve God and wealth.” A better translation would be you cannot serve God and material things.

Last week I attended preaching perspectives at Gettysburg Seminary.

Dr. Richard Carlson reminded those in attendance that the gospel of Matthew focuses on seeking the Kingdom of God first. We are to seek the kingdom of God above all things.

Sometimes our worrying comes from things we put before God. We tend to try to do things and put God on the back burner and figure everything out for ourselves. It is hard to put God first. It's hard to live and believe that God will provide for our needs. I know I fall into the trap of thinking if I have this or if I do something I will be okay.

Jesus gives us the examples of how birds and lilies participate in creation. God feeds the birds and the lilies grow. Tom McGrath in his *Living by the Word* article in the Christian Century writes, "I sense that Jesus points to the birds and the lilies as examples because they unselfconsciously participate in the life of God, life which is pouring forth through all creation. Undue worry blocks participation, which is why we humans often feel distant and disconnected from God. Fear closes down our hearts; worry puts up a barricade to grace."

When we worry, we are preoccupied and God isn't always first in our lives. We get distracted or discouraged on our journey as disciples.

When we worry instead of trying to deal with the issue at hand ourselves we can take a break and pray. We can read scriptures and we can talk with one another so that God is in the midst of our concerns and worries.

Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount that God will provide. That doesn't mean that God will give us a millions of dollars so we can stop working or that we can have all of the comforts in life that we desire.

There are issues with this text. One of them is about people who do not have everything that they need. We see poor people in our midst. There

are homeless people living in Prince Frederick and our entire country.

One could ask why God doesn't provide for them.

This text challenges us to think about the marginalized in society. Is there a way for us to use our resources to help the poor and the homeless by providing them with clothing, food, or shelter? Are we willing to listen to an individual's story or do we walk by pretending not to see them? We should evaluate our lifestyle and think about things we could change to help others as we seek the kingdom of God.

Jesus gives us a lot to think about. On the one hand he tells us not to worry, but on the other he calls us to think about putting God first in our lives – not material things that fade away.

God should be first. Are we willing to take the risk of putting our lives –
worries and all in God's hands?

Amen.