

“Worry, Worry, Worry!”

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Scripture: Matthew 6:25-33

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How many of you worry about food most days? How many of you worry about clothing or shelter? How many of you worry about money? It's hard not to have worries about those basic things isn't it? We live in an age of anxiety where we're told every time we turn on the T.V. or the radio that we don't have enough for retirement or for our children's educations or for the kinds of homes we should want. Of course all those commercials offer us solutions to those problems.

Essentially their solution to worrying over money is to get more of it. Because, as we all know, wealthy people are all happy and well adjusted and completely worry-free. The truth is we seem to be wired for worry. And it has its place. Worry can keep us alert. When our ancient ancestors were hunting for prey they needed to have a certain amount of worry to motivate them and keep them from becoming a meal themselves. And putting locks on our doors is just the prudent thing to do. Some of you may have seen the article in yesterday's paper about some thefts in a few churches downtown. You might be keeping a closer eye on your purses or being a little more careful about your things today. A little bit of worry isn't so bad.

But the problem is sometimes worry can take over our lives. It can immobilize us. We can become so concerned with projecting into the future, trying to gauge every action based on some unidentified consequence, that we lose our capacity to live in the moment and appreciate where we are.

When that happens our ability to be grateful is diminished. Everything becomes a struggle and we no longer see the goodness of things. In his book *Gratefulness, the Heart of Prayer*, Brother David Steindl-Rast, a Benedictine monk and senior member of a monastery in Elmira, NY, describes how we can begin to let go of worry. It begins with surprise.

The first line of his book is really pretty simple. He writes, “A rainbow always comes as a surprise.” Now we all understand pretty well what causes rainbows to occur. It has to do, generally, with sunlight passing through moisture in the air causing the white shaft of light to refract and split into its elemental wavelengths that we see as colors on the spectrum. And it's not as though we don't expect to see a rainbow under certain conditions. But when we do see one, what's our reaction? Don't you nudge the nearest person to make sure they see it, too? They always come as a surprise.

Now a rainbow doesn't really serve any purpose. It's just a natural phenomenon that has no effect on the world. And that's why a rainbow is so instructive. It's a reminder that life is gratuitous. It's a gift.

Learning to see life, all of life, in the same way we see a rainbow, with that same wonder and surprise, is how we can begin to let go of worry and discover gratitude again. In his poem “i thank you God for most this amazing,” ee cummings ends with the line “now the eyes of my eyes are opened.” I think that’s the effect of Jesus’ teaching especially in this portion of the Sermon on the Mount we just read.

It’s a long section in Matthew’s Gospel, chapters 5 through 7, and many scholars believe it may comprise the heart of Jesus’ teaching throughout Judea. The writer of Matthew may have taken teachings that were delivered all over and distilled them into this one long sermon. But in this particular section, just after Jesus has warned his listeners they cannot serve two masters, God and mammon, he goes on to encourage them to give up worrying about any possessions.

He turns their thoughts to the world around them. He encourages them to see how God provides for the smallest things, even to the point of showering beauty on flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow. And when they can see with new eyes how lavishly God has gifted them, they are on the path to the kingdom of God.

God’s kingdom isn’t some ethereal, otherworldly place. God’s kingdom is all around us; it is within us, and we can see it if the eyes of our eyes are opened. For most of us that happens in flashes of insight. We may experience it in the grip of an infant’s hand around our finger, or on a cold, sparkling winter night when all we can hear is the whisper of pine trees. The eyes of our eyes might be opened in the middle of hymn or in the still of prayer. But it’s hard to sustain. It’s hard to let God’s kingdom fill us and form us when the world is clamoring for our attention.

It’s not easy letting go of worries. And I don’t think Jesus means to say that it should be simple. He’s inviting us to a daily walk. Every moment we’re invited to see the world anew, to discover the wonder that’s all around us, the wonder that we are. It’s all a gift. And because it’s a gift we don’t have to cling to it. We can let it go, we can offer what we’re given to a world filled with so many that are drowning in worry and sinking fast.

Jesus is calling us to recognize that God is bigger than our circumstances. He’s calling us to discover that God is able to provide all that we need, including our need to be in community with others whose lives have become a struggle just to survive each day. But that recognition only comes when we set aside our fears and let go of our worries. Then we can re-claim our capacity to be grateful and from that deep wonder lift the prayer author Anne Lamott says is at the heart of every prayer: “Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!”

Amen