Sermon | Proper 14C

TEXT: Luke 12:22—34

7 August 2016

“Worry and Faith”

*In the Name +Jesus. Amen.*

Jesus said: “Do not be anxious.”

THIS IS THE WORD OF THE LORD.

Dear saints,

This morning, Jesus is going to tackle one of the most fundamental problems that we have as human beings, the problem of worry, anxiety. I saw a headline this week that personal stress worldwide is at an all-time high. (*Do you believe that*?) The only time it’s ever been higher was in the middle of World War II. I did a little research and found that the seven top causes of stress in our lives (*Can you guess what they are*?): job, money, relationships, health, poor diet, media overload, lack of sleep, parking at Walmart.

There’s a never ending list of things to worry about right? We all know how prone we are to being stressed out, tired out, burnt out. We all wake up in the morning and do the same thing: we run through that checklist of things to do that’s a mile long. And all of a sudden we’re worried, anxious, and afraid. And the day hasn’t even started! The test we have later in the day at school. The doctor’s visit later in the week. The business meeting later in the month with our boss. The family gathering we have on the weekend that might be stressful because we’re not exactly at peace with everyone in our family. Or how about the Voter’s meeting we have at Church—now that’s something to be stressed out about, right?

You know, the things we worry about might change over time, but what doesn’t change is that we’ve always got something to worry about. There’s always going to be problems, trouble, concerns. Look at history: in the Sixteenth Century, they were worried about the Black Plague. Today, we’re worried about the Zika Virus. During the Cold War we were worried about the threat of nuclear holocaust. Today, we’re worried about the threat of terrorism, Islamic extremism. In 2007 and 2008 we were worried about our country falling into this Great Recession, today, we’re worried about *getting out of* that same Recession. So we never run out of things to worry about. You’ll never turn on the TV and the news anchors will look at you across the screen and say, “All good. Nothing to report today.” Because there’s always something.

And so Jesus, in this morning’s Gospel is going to launch a full-on attack at our worry and anxiety. He’s going to use several arguments to do this. Because, regardless of the circumstances of our lives, regardless of the problems, trouble, difficulty we might be facing in our lives, the Lord doesn’t want us to worry. He doesn’t want us to be consumed by our anxieties and our fears. Jesus wants us to be filled with the peace that passes understanding—that means, peace when it doesn’t even make sense to be at peace; peace when it seem illogical, unreasonable to be at peace; peace when others might look at you and say, “What in the world could possibly be giving you peace in light of what you’re going through?”—Jesus wants us to be peaceful no matter what. And so worry is the topic of this morning’s Gospel.

But first it would be helpful to understand, why do we worry in the first place. Where does worry come from? And the answer is that worry comes when we start to live, believe, think, act, in our hearts and in our minds—as if there is no God, as if we were atheists and God did not exist, as if there was never a God who said, “I will take care of you,” as if it were up to us to take care of ourselves. And that’s really why worry is a lack of faith, right? Jesus calls us, “*O you of little faith*” in the Gospel? Because there is a God, and he has promised each and every one of us, “I love you, I will take care of you.” But when we worry, we’re living under this illusion that, if we’re going to be safe, if we’re going to be healthy, if we’re going to be fed, clothed, nourished, if we’re going to have a home, a family, a life—then that’s up to us to get these things for ourselves. That’s where worry comes from: thinking that we’re in control.

To get at worry, I want to start with this little verse from St. Paul. It’s a short little verse, but it carries incredible freight when talking about worry. Its 1 Cor. 4,7: St. Paul says, “*What do you have that you did not receive?*” The immediate context is that St. Paul was addressing the arrogant, boastful Corinthians, boasting in their spiritual gifts, as if they were somehow better Christians than anybody else. Paul says, “*What do you have that you did not receive?*” Do you know what that means?

Well it’s like this: if I were to ask you to make a list of everything you have in your life that you would call “good,” everything good in your life—whether material things, or spiritual things—what would be on your list? I bet your list would look a lot like mine. I bet, under material things, you’d have your husband, your wife; your children, your family; your job; your house, your home, your possessions; your food, all the way down to the daily bread, the little dinner roll that sits on your plate at suppertime.

And then under spiritual things, you’d have things like, salvation that’s yours in the blood of Christ; eternal life; the forgiveness of sins; the promise of Baptism, that you’re a child of God; access to God through prayer; the gift of the Holy Spirit and faith; the fruits that the Spirit works in you: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control; finally when Christ returns the resurrection of your body on the Last Day—all these spiritual good things that are yours by grace.

Now take it all together—from the little things to the big things, from your daily bread, scrap of bread, to the resurrection of your flesh to eternal life—take it all together, St. Paul says, wrap it up in one big package. “*What do you have that you did not receive*?” In other words, what item on that list could you point to, and say, “I got that for myself. God had nothing to do with it.” You see, everything we have in our lives is a gift, a gift that comes from the hand of a gracious God, who loves you, and provides for you. And that love, that graciousness of God isn’t baseless, but it’s founded on the sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross, the shedding of Christ’s blood, which has won you peace, reconciliation with God. It’s not up to us to get these things for ourselves. God has given all of them to us, and promises to continue giving them to us in the future*.* In view of that, why worry about anything?

[Now some of you might take issue with what I’m saying, and say, “Pastor, I have a house, a car, a life. I worked hard for what I’ve got. How can you say I didn’t get these things for myself?” “Even daily bread: some farmer had to sow the seed, harvest the wheat, bakers had to bake the bread, somebody had to package it and sell it, before it got to my table as daily bread. We work hard for the things we have. So how can you say that we didn’t get these things for ourselves?”

And I would say, yes, that’s true. But it’s still all by grace. Because if God didn’t give you a beating heart, and a thinking mind, and strength in your muscles, if God didn’t give you an intellect and a will, you wouldn’t be able to work. If God didn’t send the rain and the sun, if he didn’t cause the plant to grow, there would be no wheat, no daily bread. It’s all God’s doing, even if he uses us as his masks, as we live and work in our various vocations to live and serve our neighbor—even if he uses us to get his good and gracious will done, it’s still, at the end of the day, his work through us. That’s why, even the smartest, fastest, strongest person in the world, and the wisest Christian, should fall on his knees in humility and pray, “There but for the grace of God go I.” Because everything we’re able to do, everything we’re able to be, everything we’re able to have for ourselves is all by grace, without any merit or worthiness in me.]

So we don’t need to worry. And so we turn to the words of the Gospel. What does Jesus teach us about worry this morning? And he’s going to attack our worry using four arguments.

The first argument, Jesus teaches that **worry is unreasonable.** Jesus says, verse 22, 23: *“I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.”* You can picture somebody worrying about their food and clothing as if they didn’t have those things, it’d be the end of the world. But Jesus says there’s more to life than what you eat and drink and put on. But you see, worry exaggerates your problem. Have you noticed your problem gets bigger the more you worry about it? Somebody might’ve said something to irritate you—the more you think about it, it gets bigger, bigger. You may have a problem at work—the more you worry about it, it gets bigger and bigger. Worry never shrinks your problem, it only expands your problem, it grows it out of proportion. Worry always exaggerates the negative in your life. Jesus teaches again, worry is unreasonable: *the body is more than food, life is more than clothing.*

His second argument is this: **worry is futile**. Worry is pointless, it doesn’t work.V25, 26:*And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?*Can all your worrying prolong your life, even by an hour? Can worry make you a couple inches taller, or a couple inches thinner? Can worry change anything about the past, or anything about the future? No, the only thing worry can do is destroy the present. So why worry if worrying is pointless? A futile endeavor that does nothing for us, can’t fix anything?

His third argument is: **worry is unnatural.** V24, 27. *Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.* Jesus shows here, how nothing else in the universe worries but human beings. Animals don’t worry: the ravens don’t worry, the lilies don’t worry. Cats, dogs, plants don’t worry. Everything in creation trust God, except human beings. So worry is unnatural

His fourth argument is really the most wonderful, because here, Jesus is going to be reminding us of our value and our worth to God. We might call it, the **how much more** argument. Jesus says: *Consider 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! Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!* How much more value are you to God than anything else in all creation? You see, God didn’t send his Son to take on the flesh of a raven. God didn’t send his Son to take on the flesh of a lily. God sent his Son to take on your flesh and blood, to redeem you, a lost and condemned creature, purchase and win you from all sin, death, and the power of the devil. God’s only Son our Lord became what you are, that you might be what he is: a child of the Most High, with God as your Father in heaven, that you might live with him forever. There’s nothing more important or precious to God in all God’s creation than you. And so, if he’s got the birds’ needs covered, you had better believe he’s got your needs covered. If he’s got the lilies covered, you can bank on it—he’s got your needs covered.

Jesus closes with these words: *do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.* Seek God’s kingdom. That’s an invitation to faith, to trust in God, to abandon all self-reliance, and cast all your anxieties and your cares on him, for he cares for you. It’s an invitation to come to the rail this day, receive your Savior’s body and blood for your forgiveness and the strengthening of your faith, which is where God’s kingdom comes among us today. And it’s his invitation to live in the peace that passes all understanding, knowing and trusting in all of your problems, distresses, afflictions—Christ your Savior has got you. And he will take care of you, in this life, and in the next. Now that’s his promise, and he cannot lie. Amen.

*In the Name of the Father and of the +Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*