

**12.2.23**  
**Tidenham, St Luke's – Tutshill & Tidenham Chase**

**2<sup>nd</sup> before Lent - 16.2.20**  
**Do not worry**

Let us pray: **SONG: Be Still My Soul – Bryn Haworth**

**Matthew 6. 25-end**

<sup>25</sup> 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear.

Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?

<sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.

Are you not much more valuable than they?

<sup>27</sup> Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

<sup>28</sup> 'And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. <sup>29</sup> Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these.

<sup>30</sup> If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you – you of little faith?

<sup>31</sup> So do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?"

<sup>32</sup> For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

<sup>33</sup> But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

<sup>34</sup> Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

So the big question: and perhaps the biggest worry on your minds right now: how long am I going to preach for?

I remember once, after an exceptionally long and boring sermon the congregation was filing out of the church not saying a word to the vicar.

After a while a man shook the vicar's hand and said,  
*"Vicar, that sermon reminded me of the peace and love of God!"*

Well, the vicar was thrilled.  
*"No-one has ever said anything like that about one of my sermons before!  
Tell me, how did it remind you of the peace and love of God?"*

*"Well", said the man, "it reminded me of the peace of God because it passed all human understanding and it reminded me of the love of God because it endured forever!"*

At the heart of the teachings of Jesus is Jesus Himself.

It is not so much the words he spoke, but who he is that speaks to us because He is the Word.

And it is when we look at Jesus that we begin to understand who God is, what he is truly like.

And what we find – at the heart of it all is a God of compassion and love – one who understands our worries.

And above all – a God we can truly trust.

And we can trust him with our day-to-day worries, our burdens, anything that weighs us down.

And he says to you now: *'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.'*

If nothing else today – my prayer for you is that you feel and experience the compassion of God for your life and that your worries and burdens will be lifted away by him.

So... I wonder what you are worrying about this morning?

I'm guessing we could all make a list of at least ten things that we are currently worrying about. Tomorrow the list may change yet again.

Because we all seem to carry anxieties and worries that drain us of the life Jesus came to bring.

Today – the theme of our Gospel reading concerns worry and it's antidote, trust.

But I can't stand here and tell you I never worry ... that would not be true. I'm only human...

And human beings have always worried.

Psalm 90 – a Psalm attributed to Moses, speaks of our lives as being full of trouble and worry.

Yet today, we are more a world of worriers than ever before.

And never before has there been so many problems associated with mental health issues and anxiety.

Yet the Bible contains 365 assurances not to worry about our lives, one for each day of the year.

And in this passage Jesus tells us not to worry:

- Verse 25: *Do not worry about your life;*
- Verse 28: *Do not worry about your clothes, and what you look like all the time.*
- Verse 31: *Do not worry about food and drink.*
- Verse 34: *Do not worry about the future.*

Now these are really challenging words... what if we were living in the nightmare of Syria, or Turkey, or the Ukraine. And with the NHS being so undermined by privatization, and so many facing debts – how could we not be worried?

But Jesus didn't say, *'There's nothing to worry about'*, but rather, *'Don't worry in spite of everything there is to worry about.'*

Statistically life has never been safer, yet our world and churches are filled with worries on the scale of an epidemic, so what has gone wrong?

Why do we worry all the time?

If you look at research on anxiety and worry shows that most people's anxiety is preoccupied with:

- 40% of things that will never happen.
  - 30% of things relating to the past that can't be changed,
  - 12% of things relating to other people's criticism, which is generally untrue, and
  - 10% relating to health, which often gets worse with stress and negative thinking.
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- Only 8% of the time do they worry about real concerns that will need to be faced.

So, if only about 8% of all the issues in our lives really turn out to be 'something' why is it that we spend so much time worrying and being highly anxious and stressed about all the rest?

I saw a tea towel the other day:

Why Worry?

There are only two things to worry about  
Either you are well or you are sick.

If you are well, then there is nothing to worry about.

But if you are sick, then there are two things to worry about.

Either you get well or die.

If you get well there is nothing to worry about.

If you die there are two things to worry about.

Either you go to heaven or you go to hell.

If you go to heaven there is nothing to worry about.

But if you go to hell you will be so busy shaking hands with friends you won't have time to worry!

Arthur Rank, former Methodist Sunday School teacher who founded Pinewood Studios, an international film industry and a large group of charities, once decided to do all his worrying on one day each week.

He chose Wednesdays. When anything happened that gave him anxiety and annoyed him, he would write it down, put it in his 'worry box' and forget about it until the following Wednesday.

The interesting thing was that, on the following Wednesday when he opened his worry box, he found that most of the things that had disturbed him the past six days were no longer issues of concern.

So it would have been useless to have worried about them in the first place.

Of course, there are important things going on in our lives that we do need to take seriously.

But if we spend most of our time worrying about the inconsequential, we won't have time to focus on the things we need to face up to.

The issue with worry and anxiety raises the issue of our faith and trust in God.

- Does God know?
- Does God care?
- Is our God sovereign?
- Can we trust God?

Jesus himself tells us not to worry but to trust and seek the Kingdom of God.

There was once a woman who couldn't sleep at night because she worried that her home would be burgled.

One night her husband heard a noise in the house, so he went downstairs to investigate.

When he got there, he found a burglar.

He immediately said, *"Come upstairs and meet my wife. She's been waiting to meet you for 10 years."*

A real burglar can steal from us once. Worry can steal from us night after night, for many years.

Worry not only steals our sleep, it also steals our health and our ability to cope with life productively.

Maybe we should take the words of St Paul in his letter to the Philippians like medication three times a day, morning, noon and night to remind us to renew our minds:

*"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."* Philippians 4:6–7.

Perhaps if we prayed as much as we worry, we'd have a lot less to worry about.

So looking at our Gospel reading:

Jesus says that because God has given us life, surely we can trust him for the things that support life.

Look at the birds, he says, they don't worry, they just get on with it.

*Said the robin to the sparrow,  
"I should really like to know,  
Why these anxious human beings  
Rush about and worry so."*

*Said the sparrow to the robin,  
"Friend I think that it must be,  
That they have no Heavenly Father,  
Such as cares for you and me."*

Besides, says Jesus, worry is pointless – you can't add years to your life by worrying about it, but you can certainly steal life from your years if you do.

Look at the flowers, says Jesus.

They have a brief life.

In fact the flowers on the hillsides of Palestine often bloom for only one day.

And yet they are stunningly beautiful.

In the time of Jesus, these flowers were often thrown into clay ovens to quickly raise the temperature when you were baking bread in a hurry.

If God gives such beauty to something that is so short-lived, how much more does he care about the lives of people?

And then Jesus tells us that worrying is a sign that you are not trusting in God.

It's like the pagans who have no faith.

They are always worrying about what's on the food label, whether they have the finest wines in the store, or the latest fashions.

Instead Jesus gives us two solutions to worry:

The first is to choose to run not after things of this world, but the things of God: *Seek first the Kingdom of God.*

When we do what God wants for our lives, when we free ourselves up from the things that weigh us down, we find a safety in God, because we know we are fundamentally loved and eternally safe. Nothing will ever be able to separate us from the love of God – so why worry?

Worry is banished when God becomes the dominating power in our lives.

And secondly Jesus says that worry can be defeated when we acquire the art of living one day at a time. – v.34.

As someone once said: *Every evening I turn worries over to God. He's going to be up all night anyway.*

Better to handle the demands of each day as it comes, without worrying about the unknown future and the things that may never happen.

So what are your worries today?

Perhaps you have some very real concerns.

They may be about bills and debts, your family, your children.

Perhaps someone is ill, very ill – you worry. You find it hard to sleep and wake up feeling overwhelmed by it all.

Jesus shares your concerns. He understands. He knows them through and through – but more than that, he knows all that will happen, and he is not worrying.

Because worry doesn't take away tomorrow's troubles, it takes away today's peace.

So as you come to Communion bring all your worries to the altar, and drop them at the feet of Christ and then turn your hands to receive the nourishment you need – the bread and the wine.

He is always there beside you.

And with your hand in the hand of Christ, you will be able to find a new strength today, a new assurance, that all will be well, and all manner of things will be well.

Amen.