

Collect

Eternal God, you crown the year with your goodness and you give us the fruits of the earth in their season: grant that we may use them to your glory, for the relief of those in need and for our own well-being; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

(or)

Creator God, you made the goodness of the land, the riches of the sea and the rhythm of the seasons; as we thank you for the harvest, may we cherish and respect this planet and its peoples, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Post Communion

Lord of the harvest, with joy we have offered thanksgiving for your love in creation and have shared in the bread and the wine of the kingdom: by your grace plant within us a reverence for all that you give us and make us generous and wise stewards of the good things we enjoy; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

1 Timothy 6:6-10

⁶ Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; ⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, so that^[d] we can take nothing out of it; ⁸ but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. ⁹ But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

Matthew 6:25-33

²⁵ 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink,^[i] or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ 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? ²⁷ And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?^[k] ²⁸ And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰ 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? ³¹ Therefore do not worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" ³² For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But strive first for the kingdom of God^[l] and his^[m] righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Harvest. Do NOT Worry!

'Do not worry', Jesus says, 'about your life - what you eat or what you drink or about your body, what you wear.' The Bible has a lot of tough teaching... perhaps words like this for some of us are some of the most challenging we read in the Bible! Don't worry!

Most of us, I suspect, will worry at some point... and become anxious about life, perhaps about our income, about the cost of living, particularly fuel, about health and ageing, for ourselves and for those we love.

Or perhaps we worry about 'keeping up with the Jones'... yes sometimes our worries are pretty skewed; but as God's people hopefully with hearts of compassion – we are also caught up in bigger worries of global uncertainty, the state of our planet, pollution, our supply chains – the issues with fuel supplies what it will mean for businesses and in particular our farming communities?

We also know that millions of people in God's world have every right to worry about food and clean water, clothing and shelter, and we try to get our heads around what it must be like to be in Yemen, or North Korea or perhaps even someone having to face the humbling and, in some cases, the humiliating journey to a food bank... some of us may even be in that category!

The call to not worry feels rather challenging! As one commentator says, "Do not worry?? You've got to be kidding. Most days, life feels like one worry strung after another like lights on a morbid Christmas tree."

Yet this call from Jesus is not a dismissal of genuine human concern... *“your heavenly father knows you need these things”* (verse 32). What Jesus does, and it’s rather important, is move the emphasis from us and our human concerns, to God? The concern remains, but as we turn to the Lord our response to it changes.

As my psychologist wife keeps telling me, *“Worrying like you’re worrying isn’t helping you or the situation!!”* Rather the worry can make us take a disproportionate sense of responsibility upon our shoulders. Worrying tires you out and can make you unwell so you can’t do anything about it even if you wanted to! And worrying, can end up looking merely at your own inadequacy in the situation, and fail to pay any attention to God’s provision.

Jesus, want us to take a moment... a bit of reprogramming... meditation... mindfulness... noticing... awareness... refocusing. Turn our gaze from us and worries to God. And Jesus does this with simple beautiful illustrations. *“Consider the birds of the air.” “Consider the lilies of the field.”*

That day on the sermon on the mount, Jesus stopped all those gathered around him and possibly worrying... *“consider God – who feeds the birds, who clothes the lilies.”* Life may be tough even for the birds looking for food, yet the birds are fed. And the lilies – the Greek word covers a variety of flowers... just look at the sheer variety, texture, delicacy, scent, the myriad colours. The flowers are painted and given scent by God.

William Wordsworth said: *“To me the meanest flower that blows can give thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.”*

Jesus here is transforming the way we think and view life. He reminds us that the source of everything is the goodness and creativity and sheer abundant generosity of God our Father. Creation, in its fruitfulness, in its diversity, in its generosity is an outward and visible sign of the loving care and provision of the God we worship. Some of us know this already... when you go for a walk in the fresh air, the woods, up a mountain or alongside the seashore, or spending time in the garden... you gain new perspective.

I think Jesus had a real compassion for the worrier when he said these words about worry... and a real embrace of the one whose heart is weighed down. He wants us to be set free – I understand that the word ‘worry’ comes from the root ‘to strangle’. **God doesn’t want to strangle us or want us to be strangled!!** There is a worry that is all too normal, but also worry that is all too human, earth-bound, wrongly self-sufficient; a worry that can strangle the joy and happiness and even the faith out of us. Spiritually, it strangles the life out of us... so much so that we cannot see the beauty of God in the world.

Jesus isn’t saying *“the situation you face is not serious”* – boy some situations are serious and God know that!!

Jesus isn’t saying *“don’t come to me with your pathetic troubles, there are bigger fish to fry you little sprat.”* God is interested in ALL of life and ALL of our lives.

Jesus isn’t saying *“This worrying situation has nothing to do with you, stay out of it!”* We have responsibilities and sometimes we may well be called to respond big time!

Jesus IS saying *“stop a moment... don’t worry – don’t take everything upon yourself... come to me, look to me, trust me, invite me to reign in you and in this.”*

Jesus wants to transform the way we think, respond and live. He wants to set us free from the chains of worry by inviting us to set our eyes on God and to exercise faith and trust in the goodness of God day to day in all of life.

That is why the Church celebrates Harvest Thanksgiving. This is the total opposite of a self- sufficiency congratulate ourselves Festival. **All good gifts around us are sent from heaven above.** That’s why farmers

and people would always have flocked to church in their droves at Harvest... and why the churches were full! People used to REALLY know that they were totally dependent on the weather and upon God for their harvest and life itself.

Jesus moves our worrying from despair to prayer. And in prayer we invite God into the situation, and draw on him for a response.

As ST Paul wrote from prison to the church in Philippi (Philippians 4:6-7) *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, 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 minds in Christ Jesus.”*

In true intercessory prayer... pouring out hearts out before God, we can find a way forward that is better than worry. So instead of spending our waking hours worrying, (in my case about my family, the state of the world, the Parish... its people, its welfare, its funding, its buildings, its future and thinking it all depends on me) which cannot add a single hour to our life, spend the time that you would normally worry, praying – see your worry as a prompt to prayer. Explain to God all the things that you are worried about. Hand them over to him. Be open to how you might respond in Him. Perhaps keep a prayer diary and then check every now and then what God may have done, and trust that HE is Lord.

Worrying... to prayer... to thanksgiving. From independence and disproportionate sense of personal responsibility in and for EVERYTHING... to dependence and co-operation with Lord, who made heaven and earth, crowneth the year with his goodness (Ps 65:11), hears our cry, and whose love endures forever (Ps 136).