

Scripture: Matthew 6.24-34 (2)
Date: February 27, 2011
Service: 8 Epiphany
Place: St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Palatka, FL
The Rev. Canon James M. Dorn III, Rector

Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

Today's Gospel lesson is the original unaltered version of Bobby McFerrin's song, "Don't Worry Be Happy." Here are some of the lyrics:

In every life, we have some trouble but when you worry, you make it double.
Don't worry, be happy.

Ain't got no cash, ain't got no style.
Don't worry, be happy.

'Cause when you worry, your face will frown and that will bring everybody down.
Don't worry, be happy.

Put a smile on your face.
It will soon pass whatever it is.
Don't worry, be happy.

The problem with this peppy feel good song is that it reinforces the false notion, "there is nothing but the passage of time to make your troubles go away," something this priest knew was anything but true.

One day a layperson saw his newly appointed vicar looking out his study's window, soaking in the horrifying conditions of the city, and crying. For a moment, the layman paused not knowing what he should say and finally he said, "Father, don't worry. After you've been here a while, you'll get used to it." The priest responded, "I know. That's why I am crying."

For things to change from troublesome to happy, something more must happen than the passage of time. Since worrying fixes nothing and removes joy, we must move from being a worrywart and intentionally put into practice Jesus' wise words, "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today."

Moving from the stance of worry into action begins when we decide who we are going to serve. Are we going to serve the world with all its dangers, vices, and uncertainties or are we going to serve the one who loves us, Jesus Christ? In answering the question, we will be saying yes to either the world who will use and abuse you or yes to God who will love you today and will love you for all of eternity. The choice is a difficult but necessary one, which is why Jesus said, "*No one can serve two masters. The person will hate one master and love the other, or will follow one master and refuse to follow the other. You cannot serve both God and worldly riches.*" (NCV)"

If your focus is in the world then you will always be struggling to get the next promotion; the newest car, truck, or boat; a better house; perfect children and grandchildren; or whatever worldly obsession

you may have. In this world, life isn't fair. No matter how hard you work, the promotion or better job may never come and the lazy bum not working beside you with might get the promotion or the better job before you do. From the moment you signed the papers on your new car, truck, or boat it is already obsolete and before the year is over the dealership will be after you to buy their new and improved model. You can be the best parent in the world, if something like that actually exists, and give your children all the love and attention they could ever want or need and they can still become addicted to drugs, alcohol, or become infatuated with any idiot that gives them a wink and a smile. And for everything you have worked so hard to get, you could wake up one day and find out it is all gone because someone made a mistake and that someone wasn't you. The world is tough, consuming whoever it desires regardless of race, creed, national origin, or whether you are rich or poor. All the world really wants to do is to devour your happiness with worry about a tomorrow that may never come, something we recall on Ash Wednesday by the imposition of ashes and someone telling you, "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return."

To point out how futile worrying is, here is a portion of my 2008 sermon.

Saturday morning, CNN ran a show called, We Were Warned: Out of Gas, which predicts a total collapse of anything that moves and complete global chaos by October 29th 2009. And immediately after the segment the newscasters announced, "There is Pain at the Pump! Everybody is Hurting! This is shaping up to be a Summer of Discontent with the rising price of fuel!" And all that sort of reporting does is increase anxiety about what may or may not happen.

Does that sound familiar. Did worrying change anything then? Well then, it's not going to change anything now either. So this is what you need to do, "*Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness.*"

Why? Because God knows you need food, clothing, and shelter and he will provide your needs if you stop worrying and seeking things you do not need and instead fall on your knees and seek God's face and the kingdom of God. When you strive, to seek a vibrant faith there is nothing you need that God will not provide because he knows you and he knows what the big picture is for your life, for the life of those you love, and for your life in heaven. On the other hand, you can only see the present and you must learn to trust God with the future because today's troubles are more than enough for one day.

The apostle Peter knew this very well when he wrote his pastoral letter to his flock in exile, "God is against the proud, but he gives grace to the humble. Be humble under God's powerful hand so he will lift you up when the right time comes. Give all your worries to him, because he cares about you. Control yourselves and be careful! The devil, your enemy, goes around like a roaring lion looking for someone to eat. Refuse to give in to him, by standing strong in your faith. You know that your Christian family all over the world is having the same kinds of suffering. And after you suffer for a short time, God, who gives all grace, will make everything right. He will make you strong and support you and keep you from falling. He called you to share in his glory in Christ, a glory that will continue forever. (1 Peter 5:5b-10 NCV)"

Thomas a Kempis in *The Imitation of Christ* puts our troubles, worries, and miseries into perspective when he wrote, "*You are miserable wherever you are and wherever you turn, unless you turn to God. Why are you troubled because things happens to you that are not according to your wishes and desires? Who has everything according to their own will? Neither you nor I, nor any man upon the*

earth. No one in the world is free from trouble or anguish, whether King or Pope. Who then is the happiest? The one who is able to suffer something for God's sake."

Today's troubles are enough for today. Cast your worries at the foot of the cross and do your best to put Christ first in your life knowing that no matter how difficult things may become, your basic needs will be met and Jesus will always love you and never forsake you.

Let us pray,

In the face of trouble, let us always cry out to the Lord our God. He will send us the Savior and Defender who will free us from it. Come, let us bow down and worship our God, let us show our sadness to the God who made us, for he is himself the Lord our God and we are his people, the sheep of his pasturing, and he will send the Savior to our help. Amen. *Gothic Breviary (7th Century)*