



Broad Street Presbyterian Church

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“Do Not Worry”

Matthew 6:25-31, 33

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Jesus says,

“Do not worry about your life.”

Do not worry? You’ve got to be kidding. Most days, life feels like one worry strung after another like lights on a Christmas tree gone horribly wrong.

“Do not worry about your life.”

How can we do that when there is so much to worry about? Some of us worry about terrorism. Others worry about the proliferation of guns. Some of us worry about paying for college; others worry about retirement. We worry about our health and the health of those we love. We worry about identify theft. We worry about people never speaking to each other again.

Ours is an anxious culture and we are living in anxious times. The evening news depends upon worries at home and abroad to attract viewers. More and more of our houses sport home security signs in our front lawns, whether we have security systems or not. Commercials are constantly inviting us to worry about one more thing – usually about ourselves – that the sponsored product will solve.¹

Everywhere we turn, everywhere we look, there are visible reminders of just how much there is to worry about.

And that’s OK because I am good at worrying. This past Sunday night, do you remember how windy it was? I lay in bed for hours worried that the wind would scatter the paper in my recycling bin and, come morning, my neighbors would find bits of my life in their front yard. Oh, I’m good at worrying.

And there is Jesus saying,

“Do not worry about your life.”

It’s absurd, really, and unreasonable and Jesus is asking us to stop doing something that is as natural as breathing – something that we are really, really good at. We are invested in our worries. Jesus has no right to ask us – to command us – to stop worrying.

Except that, of course, he’s right about this one. Worrying serves no purpose. Worrying accomplishes nothing. Jesus asks, “Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?” We all know that answer to that question. Except it’s worse than that. All this worrying is bad for us. It saps our strength and takes a toll

¹ <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=1522>

on our emotional and physical health. Just think of what we could do with the time and energy we devote to worry. We could – I don't know – master the Rubik's cube or invent a flying car or cure cancer.

Jesus invites us to put aside worry and instead focus on God's faithfulness. "Look at the flowers – look at the birds," he says. "Really see them, how effortlessly flowers grow and birds soar thanks to God's good gifts of rain and soil and air." This time of year, flowers are few and far between and so many birds go south for the winter. I confess that, even in the spring and summer, flowers and birds don't always inspire me to think of God's care for me and those I love.

What does that for me are sunrises and sunsets. I think we have pretty good ones here in central Ohio. Purples and pinks and shades of blue made more interesting because of the clouds we so often have in our sky. Sunrises and sunsets stop me in my tracks. I put down worry and gaze in wonder at the beauty of the world and the grace of the Creator.

Worship can be like that. Worship should be like that. Every Sunday there is this invitation to put down our work, to stand up straight, to look around, to fully engage with the people in our lives, to not look behind or ahead, to drink in the possibilities to be found in this day that God has given us. To sail upon the currents of God's love like a bird does the air.

"Do not worry about your life."

I don't know about you but all of this not worrying and focusing on what is in front of me sounds lovely but a little unrealistic and unattainable, a little too unicorns and puppy dogs. The truth is that laying aside worry and trusting in God does not alter the challenges that we face. Living more in the moment doesn't make any of those challenges magically go away.

In his admonition not to worry, I think Jesus is pushing us to get real about the life that we are actually living. I think worry is often our way of wishing that we were someone else, living a different life rather than investing ourselves, our love, our energy into the life we are actually living. We worry about the future because we are dissatisfied with the present. When the truth is that we haven't given the present – this day – this moment – the person in front of us – a chance. It's a daily struggle to see what is right in front of us, to fully experience the day. Doing that is hard and beautiful and hard and worthwhile. Did I mention that it's hard?

Joe Blair is a full-time pipe fitter and part-time writer who lives in Iowa with his wife and four children. One of his children, Michael, has been diagnosed with severe and profound autism. The one thing that soothes Michael, that calms him down, is the sound of ocean waves. The first time he visited the beach, he listened to the sound of the surf and it was as if he finally found someone who spoke his language. Living in Iowa, his visits to the real ocean are few and far between so every day Michael tries to recreate the sound of the waves. He goes into his backyard and paces back and forth on a patch of dirt. As he walks, he drags one of his father's belts behind him, brushing it from side to side. This he does for hours on end as he tries to recreate the soothing sound of the waves.

In his writing, his father, Joe, is honest about how hard it to be the parent of a child with severe autism. He writes,

When I was 10, I would pray to God and ask for my challenge. "Give me my challenge," I would pray. "Give me my challenge." And at my lowest moments I have thought: "That was my mistake. I asked for it."

These days I rarely talk to Mike because he rarely responds in any way. You may think this is cruel, ignoring my own son. And if you were to spend one day with him, you might be full of energy and hope and good will. But I have been with him every day of his life for 11 years. My bad habit of ignoring my son has become ...ingrained... And I ignore the very things that fascinate Michael. The belt. The patch of dirt...

Tonight, I lie next to Mike. It's 11, well past his bedtime... He has been laughing hysterically for at least an hour, which might seem cute to you but to me indicates that Michael is on the edge of a seizure. Our faces are very close in the dark. Mike likes it this way. Close. He is a beautiful boy. His eyes are large and liquid...

The great challenge I asked for when I was a boy, imagining the ... Argonauts and the seven feats of Hercules, is lying in bed next to me, very close to my face. ... The great challenge, my great challenge, is nothing other than ... a question of kindness.

Can I, being alive at this time, love this boy? Can I listen to him? Can I be a good father to this boy?

We have glimpsed the future, of Mike [a few years from now] at 6-foot-3 and 250 pounds, his sporadic anger triggering the need for drugs, restraints, while I grow older, smaller and weaker. And [my wife] and I decided that we want a shot at a different future, one in which Mike, near his beloved waves, in a place where it seems he belongs, maybe isn't so troubled.

So after nearly two decades in Iowa, we're moving to the coast, to the waves. I have no work there, but I will find work. We have no community awaiting us, but we will make one.

"Mike," I say, in the darkness. "You're a good kid." I say it, and then I keep listening for once. I don't stop listening after a few seconds as I normally do. Instead, I let the seconds run on.

Mike has ceased his laughter now. After some time, I don't know how long, he whispers very quietly, "You're" and "a good kid." And then, "a good." And then, "kid." And then, "Mike, you're a good kid."

"I'm proud of you," I say. The words wave and wave. And then they come back. Broken and then full. "Proud," Michael says. "I'm proud of you."

"I love you," I say. It's a profession. It's also a self-rebuke.

"Love," Mike says a few minutes later. "I love you. Love you. I love. I love you. You."

After Mike seems to be done with his response, I ask, "How would you like to live by the ocean?"

This brings a big smile. He is looking off. Away. At something far. The words wave and wave. "Ocean," he says.²

It's hard to do what Jesus says – to show up for the life we've been given. To stop and listen to the person right in front of us. To neither look too far back and get mired in regret or look too far forward and be overcome with fear. To show up for our lives. To listen for once. To breathe deeply. Breathe deeply.

² <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/11/fashion/11love.html>

I think of Joe lying in the dark face to face with his son, taking the time to listen, really listen. And I think of him and his wife making the tough decision to uproot their lives so that their son might have a better future.

Sometime pushing aside worry takes more than just breathing. Sometimes we need to do something. It's hard to change our emotions without first changing our actions. This past Sunday night, after hours of worrying and listening to the wind howl, I finally put on my shoes and walked out into the yard and brought the recycling bin inside. And then – go figure - I fell asleep. I wish putting aside worry was always that straight forward.

“Do not worry about your life.”

There is nothing easy about that command. There are actions that we can take that help us worry less and show up for our life more. I know of a family who are shooting one second of video of their life every day. There's an app for this. Of course there's an app. It helps you create “a modern day visual diary.”³ As a family, every day they pick a second they want to capture and remember. The app helps them put those seconds together and at the end of the year they will have this visual record of 2017 that will be 365 seconds long. The whole thing is helping this family to pay better attention to the life they are living, to be more grateful, to live more intentionally.

“Do not worry about your life.”

What helps you worry less and show up more? Maybe it's yoga. Maybe it's meditation. Maybe it's volunteering for a cause that connects to your deepest values. Maybe it's coloring in one of those coloring books for adults that are so popular right now. Maybe it's saying grace before a meal shared with your family. Maybe it's doing something to change you or your world.

“Do not worry about your life.”

Is there a harder teaching? Is there a more life-giving teaching?

“Do not worry about your life.”

Because Jesus asks us to. And because our lives go better when we do this hard thing.

³ <http://Ise.co/>