

SERMON: "GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD"
TEXTS: OLD TESTAMENT EXODUS 16:9-18
NEW TESTAMENT MATTHEW 6:25-34

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INTRODUCTION

I had my annual physical a week or so ago

With the notable exceptions of emergency surgery after a bike wreck and major back surgery, that is it for my trips to the doctor.

Just the annual physical ... and the annual trip to treat my poison ivy

It's pretty much an annual visit because I keep going where I should not go

I know I am very allergic to it. Wore long sleeves and gloves to do yard work

Still got it through just a small hole in one glove. Off to the doctor

I've said more than once, "I'm not pulling any more weeds." Then I tell myself 'I'll be careful.' Then I pull a few weeds. Then ... off to the doctor.

I know better. Still I keep doing things I know are not good for me, are not going to help

Is that something you might have experience with ... not just the poison ivy but anything you know won't help, not one bit ... and you keep doing it?

Say for example – worry. Any worriers in the room? Any worriers online?

What does Jesus say about worry?

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? 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? And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your span of life?”

Worry cannot add a single hour to our span of life, not one.

I don't hear these words from Jesus as him scolding us for worrying.

I'm natural and normal to worry. What Jesus does with our worries is more than a 'Thou shalt not.' He gives us something better to do. He shifts our focus from our real worries to the just as real evidence of God's care for us

Notice the language of "look." He first tells us to look at the birds.

God takes good care of them. Then he tells us to consider the lilies

God cares for them too. And he ends by telling us to seek the kingdom

All of the verbs he uses are about our focus. O say, can you see?

Do we see all the evidence of God's provision – daily bread, daily mercy?

GRUMBLE OR GIVE THANKS

The “do not worry” words from Jesus are defined in many ways by the context
First by the verses before telling us we cannot serve God and wealth
Thinking that life is about getting – getting enough, then getting more and more
to the point that is all we think about ... and worry about

The worry addressed here is rather specific ... Do I have enough?
Tom Long, in his commentary on Matthew, puts it this way

*The decision whether to store up treasures on earth or treasures in heaven is not one of mere financial planning; it is one of basic orientation ...
If a person sees life as a gift from God, a bountiful outpouring of God's providence, then that person is free to hold possessions with a light grasp and to be generous to others. On the other hand, if life is seen as a competitive struggle between winners and losers over limited resources, then one is a slave to this struggle, and the only viable creed is “Where's Mine?”*

I like how he frames this as a question of our orientation, how we see things
Take Halloween for example. Beth bought the candy following the wisdom
that you buy candy you like, just in case. And I do like candy.
So the evening begins and I'm handing out candy – 2 or 3 pieces each time
I tell myself I am being 'moderate' and generous

Then Beth takes over – a whole handful each and every time
Now I admit. I started thinking ... hey, that's my candy.
And I realize I'm proving Tom Long's point. I'm seeing life “*as a competitive struggle between winners and losers over limited resources ...*”

Beth, on the other hand is, with her handfuls of candy, proving the same point
with her generosity. And to further prove the point, we still have
two bags of baby ruths, two bags of butterfingers, a bag of snickers,
plus laffy taffy and tootsie rolls ... A bountiful outpouring
I'm not going to worry about having enough candy

The 'do not worry' is defined further by the verses that follow telling us to look around
Look at all that God has given us – the beauty and bounty of creation,
all the different examples of 'our daily bread.' This is a sermon about daily bread.
Do we take it for granted? Do we see what we have as a gift? Do we see
our daily bread, smell it, feel it, taste it. Or do we just scarf it down?

One of the things I've learned and am still learning is to slow down and enjoy
the food in front of me (and the people around me). I've rushed through
too many meals. I want to not only give thanks for my daily bread. I want to enjoy it!
“Taste and see that the Lord is good” isn't just about communion

REDIRECTED

We sometimes lose sight of whose we are, that we really are God's dependents
Like the children of Israel before us, we are in our own way given our daily bread
Yes, we work for it. Our name is on the paycheck and the bank account
and the credit card ... but God is the provider.

Jesus makes that clear again directing our gaze beyond our worries

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? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the gentiles who seek all these things, and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Understanding that life is a gift doesn't let us off the hook or encourage idleness
There is still work to be done ... daily bread to harvest, to bake and share
Understanding life as a gift, however, does put our work in perspective

As my parents pointed out on more than a few occasions and I, in turn,
have shared with my children. "Hard work never hurt anybody."
That is true. But isn't it also true that we often over work and over worry?
We get caught up in all our doing, forgetting we are human beings
not human doings. We end up hurrying, scurrying and worrying

Or in my case, ending up at the urgent care with poison ivy ... again
Need to stop worrying about the weeds – literal and figurative

Jesus tells me not to worry ... but I'm still going to do it.
His telling me not to worry does help me worry less
And it helps me direct my worries, gives me something to do with them
He redirects us to a better way – to seek ye first the kingdom of God
and his righteousness. Then he adds something quite helpful saying ...
these things (the things we worry about) will be given unto us.

I do worry less when I focus on what God is doing in this world
It gives me a defiant and resilient hope when I see the birds of the air
and the lilies of the field more so than I see the weeds around my house

That kind of focus helps with my worries. So too does having a few tools
No not gloves and long sleeved shirts (still got poison ivy)
I'm talking spiritual disciplines that I have found helpful

SUMMARY

I share them not as an expert but as one who has found them helpful
You might find them helpful with your worries. Trying to be a practical preacher.

These two are simple prayers. The first is one that is widely used in recovery groups, a help to people overcoming addiction walking the steps, a help to anyone and everyone. It is the serenity prayer, attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr
The prayer in the image is from a chip / coin from a 12 step group
People often carry these coins with them – a prayer in your pocket

Show image – Serenity Prayer coin

This prayer, I'd suggest, does what Jesus does with our worries
It re-directs us, shifts our focus. I pray this prayer quite often
Maybe you're like me ... you worry about things you cannot change
Particularly about what someone else might do or, in my mind ought to do
Whew! Could I use some serenity about those kinds of worries

The re-direction continues as we pray for courage the change the things
we can and the wisdom to know the difference. Good directions
I sure could use more serenity, more courage, more wisdom

Another benefit of the serenity prayer is that it is brief, you can memorize it
The other tool I'd share, one that keeps my prayers out of the poison ivy,
is even simpler ... no words needed. My friend Sue Westfall led a retreat
for our presbytery 7-8 years ago at the Catholic Worker House on Union Rd
I worked with her in Atlanta too. She was on presbytery staff there.

She suggested when we pray for God to take something out of our hands
that we open our hands. Stop holding onto it. Open our hands and let it go
That in its own way is a kind of serenity prayer

I pray with my hands open quite often – daily
And when that day comes that I get a bit too focused on the weeds in my yard
I'm going to open my hands to pray ... then I'm going to put the gloves
back on the shelf, open a Dr. Pepper and watch a ballgame