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Luke 12:22-34
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It's Actually Not That Complicated!

A young boy was driving a wagon filled with hay down the road when the wagon fell over in front of a farmer's house.

The farmer came out, saw the young boy crying, and said, "Son, don't worry about this, we can fix it.

"But, right now lunch's ready. Why don't you come in and eat with us and then I'll help you put the wagon back on its feet."

The boy said, "No, I can't. My father is going to be very angry with me."

The farmer said, "Now don't worry. You've got yourself all worked up. Just come in and have some lunch and you'll feel better."

The boy said, "I really shouldn't. I just know if I do, my father is going to be very angry with me."

The farmer paid the boy no heed and ushered the young man inside and they had lunch.

Afterwards, as they walked outside to the wagon, the farmer said, "Now, son, don't you feel better after that great meal?"

The boy said, "Yes but I just know that my father will be very angry with me."

The farmer said, "Nonsense. Where is your father anyway?"

The boy said, "He's under that wagon."

I'd be worried too!

Several years ago, Bobby McFerrin recorded a little song entitled, “Don’t Worry – Be Happy.”

Here are a few 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 place to lay your head, somebody came and took your bed, don’t worry, be happy.

The landlord say your rent is late, he may have to litigate, don’t worry, be happy.

Now, who in this room buys that? Everybody worries, sometimes. To be concerned is to be human, yet, worry can also be a problem.

For nineteen million people in this country worry is a chronic mental illness.

For many more, it is a fact of life that requires therapy, and maybe even medication.

Here is the truth. I have suffered from a form of anxiety/depression for the last thirteen years. I take medication. It helps. A lot! Some of us need that.

However, it hasn’t stopped me from worrying. I worry about finances, about DeLynn, about getting everything that needs to be accomplished done during the week, having a God breathed sermon for you all on Sunday.

The fact that we humans remember the past, anticipate the future, and make choices about the present adds stress to our lives.

Sometimes it is carved into our bodies by sores that we call ulcers. Sometimes it is etched into our faces by lines that we call wrinkles.

It can be seen in a frown, heard through footsteps pacing back and forth across a floor late at night.

Sometimes it is muffled by the silence of simply lying in bed staring at the ceiling without being able to go to sleep.

Some people call it tension; other people call it anxiety; Jesus called it worry.

I think a French soldier in World War I had the best attitude around worry. He said:

“Of two things, one is certain. Either you are at the front, or you are behind the lines.

“If you are at the front, of two things one is certain. Either you are exposed to danger, or you are in safe place.

“If you are exposed to danger, of two things one is certain. Either you are wounded, or you are not wounded.

“If you are wounded, of two things one is certain. Either you recover, or you die.

“If you recover, there is no need to worry. If you die, you cannot worry. SO WHY WORRY?” See? It’s not that complicated!

Someone once made this observation, “Elephants live longer than people, maybe because they never worry about trying to lose weight.”

Oh yea, that’s something else I worry about!

The United States Public Health Service issued a statement some time ago about the tendency of worry to weaken and shorten life. It read in part:

“So far as is known, no bird ever tried to build more nests than its neighbor. No fox ever fretted because it had only one hole in which to hide.

“No squirrel ever died of anxiety, lest it should not lay up enough for two winters instead of one.

“And no dog ever lost any sleep over the fact that it had not enough bones laid aside for the declining years.”

Worry wreaks havoc. It makes you ineffective and inefficient. It weakens you for the long haul.

And that is why Jesus has something to say to us today about worry.

Of course, when we read about Jesus telling us not to worry about our food or clothes, I’ve got to admit, that’s not what I worry about.

For some of us, perhaps worry for food and clothes is a part of the worry of life, but for most of us, I am thinking that our list of worries is a little more complicated or at least we think they are more complicated.

Life does seem more complicated than it was in Jesus’ day.

The “more complicated” things that we may worry about: Car accidents. Aging ungracefully and being struck with Alzheimer’s or some other debilitating disease. Cancer.

The price of gas. Criticism from others. Losing a job and not being able to find another one. Terrorism. House payments, car payments, our kids.

Being an empty nester – or – stopping being an empty nester. Yes, our 29 year-old has moved back in with us this week! ☺ One more thing for me to worry about – will she ever move out again???

For some reason, all of these worry issues seem so much more complicated than what Jesus describes in Luke 12.

As Ulrich Luz put it, Jesus’ statement could only have been written by a single guy living a carefree life on the beach in sunny Galilee.

Obviously, Jesus never had to worry about the rent or health insurance or car insurance.

So what if Jesus did write this passage to us in OUR day?

What if we included more complicated issues into what Jesus said? Perhaps then we might feel that he was speaking directly into our lives. How about this...

Here now, our passage for this morning from Luke 12:22-34
(New Revised Updated Modernization Version)

²² Then Jesus said to his disciples:

Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, or random biological terrorist attacks, or how the stock market will do or even who will win next month’s election.

²³ Life is more than safety and security, and happiness is more than what does or does not happen to you.

²⁴ Consider the Amish: They sow and reap without modern technology and God feeds them and protects them. And are you not as valuable as they?

²⁵ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

²⁶ Since you can't even do that, why worry about the rest?

²⁷ Consider the Kardashians. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.

²⁸ If that is how God clothes people who are absolutely worthless in society, who are here today, and tomorrow will be thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith!

²⁹ And do not set your heart on getting filthy rich or being physically perfect; don't worry about it.

³⁰ For only those who are trying to keep up with the Jones' run after all such things, and your Father knows if you need them.

³¹ But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

³² Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.

³³ So, sell your possessions on Craigslist and give the proceeds to the poor.

Provide purses for yourselves made out of duct tape that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted,

where no computer hacker can steal your identify and no stock market crash can destroy your 401k.

³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Now, that is perhaps a little irreverent, but I hope in a moment you will see the point I am making.

Jesus was attempting to teach the people about worry and used the examples that they were most familiar with.

He used food. He mentions clothing. He talks about worries of the body. Those were the examples of his day.

The examples, though, are not the point. The examples are only examples and are meant to make the people think about their lives in the midst of the truths he is presenting.

So, if we take a look at this passage and we strip away any examples that Jesus is using. For example, take out talk of ravens.

And if we just briefly ignore for the moment any examples that we might not connect with, and just for the moment we take out verses about moths and rust, what are we left with?

I believe we are left with a number of core eternal principles that apply to our lives no matter your worry.

I believe that Jesus did have our lives in mind when he taught these things.

He knew that our lives would become ever more complicated, but that his words apply, no matter the situation.

He wants us to understand that worry is fruitless.

So, in our text Jesus asks, “Which of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Why then worry?”

Maybe it would help to look at this as a word problem. Word problems are the worst kind of math problems ever.

I think a math teacher and an English teacher got married and decided to invent word problems, ever the bane of my existence.

So here is Jesus’ life math problem spelled out for you.

Suppose you are walking through your life at 5 mph towards eternity which is about 30 years away.

You’re worried about someone in your family getting cancer and so you begin to worry and cry and have stress.

Now, if you aren’t worried about cancer, insert any worry you wish into the problem.

Now here is the math problem, what have you added to your life? What have you gained? What benefit has worry brought into your life?

Worrying cannot add an inch to your height, a pound to your weight, or a minute to your clock.

It never solved a problem, never dried a tear, never lifted a burden, never removed an obstacle. It never made bad things good or good things better.

You know, worrying is like shoveling smoke. You’re not any better off when you’re done than you were when you started.

Here’s what worry does. It pulls tomorrow’s cloud over today’s sunshine. It does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow; it empties today of its strength.

We know that medical science has closely tied worry to heart trouble, blood pressure problems, ulcers, thyroid malfunction, migraine headaches, a host of stomach disorders, amongst others.

For example, 25 million Americans have high blood pressure due to stress/anxiety.

1 million more develop high blood pressure each year. 8 million have stomach ulcers.

Every week, 112 million people take medication for stress related symptoms.

How unnecessary!

There was a University of Michigan study determined that 60% of our worries are unwarranted.

20% have already become past activities and are completely out of our control. 10% are so petty that they don't make any difference at all.

Of the remaining 10%, only 4 to 5% are real and justifiable, and of those, we can't do anything about half of them.

So that means only 2% of our worries are worth putting any attention to.

I am reminded of what Mark Twain once said: "I have been through some terrible things in my life; some of which actually happened."

So Jesus tells us "Relax. Let go. Open your eyes, your hearts, even your clenched fists.

“Be generous. Give to the poor. Get yourselves a bank that can’t go bankrupt, a bank in heaven far from bank robbers, safe from embezzlers, a bank you can bank on.

“It’s obvious, isn’t it? The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being.”

Jesus commands us at the end of this passage on worry to have an eternal perspective in our hearts.

The point is not that our external circumstances do not matter. The point is that regardless of our external circumstances, ultimately we have the choice to make.

Will we allow our thoughts to spin out of control or learn to take them captive to make them obedient to Christ?

Notice that nowhere in the entire New Testament does Jesus say to us, “Do not have problems.” While we cannot always choose our circumstances, we can choose our response.

So, how do we do that? If Jesus wants us to actively push worry away, how do we do that in the midst of worrying about terrorist attacks or our insurance bill or the job interview or the loss of benefits at work or the blood test results?

Or the cost of the MRI or the million other things that may weigh on our hearts? How do we do that?

Well, first, I think we should make up our minds to trust in God and allow him to move in us.

In Romans 12:2 the Apostle Paul writes:

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...”

That is exactly what we must do if we are to find freedom from worry. We must allow God’s word to transform us from the inside out.

We must allow God to work in our minds so that we can replace anxious thoughts with peace filled, faith filled, thoughts, even as we allow the word of God to penetrate our minds, confronting the lies of this world with the truth of God.

Second, we have got to be people of prayer.

There is no substitute and there is no alternative to getting down on our knees before the God of the Universe and pouring out our heart to him.

Philippians 4:6-7 reminds us:

“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.”

Isn’t that a great promise?

Sure, we are used to getting things done. If it’s broke, fix it. If it’s old, replace it. If it’s needed, do it.

I like action-packed doers of the Word. That’s what I love about this church.

Yet there remain illnesses that won’t heal, problems that can’t be solved and people who won’t get with the program.

That's frustrating!

When I have nowhere else to go, I am comforted by the prayer 20th century theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, penned.

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time, accepting hardship as a pathway to peace,

Taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it, trusting that You will make all things right, if I surrender to Your will,

That I may be reasonably happy in this life, and supremely happy with You forever in the next. Amen.

People say that a day of worry is more exhausting than a day of work.

Some people handle worry by eating chocolates, others have a stiff drink. There are web sites that will worry for you, if you will pay the price.

I have a better idea. Why don't you bring your worries to God in prayer ... and then leave them there.

Of course, that has to be combined with self-control and the willingness to constantly come to God in the midst of worry. This isn't a one-time thing.

I recommend, as AA and other recovery programs suggest: One day at a time. Give up your worries to God – all of them. Just for today.

And then repeat the process tomorrow and the day after that ... and the day after that... forever.

Sometimes attributed to “Dear Abby,” the following is entitled, “The Ten Commandments for a Long and Peaceful Life.” I think it sums this all up what I have been saying really well!

1. Thou shalt not worry, for worry is the most unproductive of all human activities.

2. Thou shalt not be fearful, for most of the things we fear never come to pass.

3. Thou shalt count thy blessings, never overlooking the small ones – for a lot of small blessings add up to a big one.

4. Thou shalt not become bogged down by frustration, for 50 percent of it is rooted in self-pity and will only interfere with positive actions.

5. Thou shalt not take problems to bed with you, for they make very poor bedfellows.

6. Thou shalt not borrow other people’s problems. They can take better care of them than you.

7. Thou shalt be a good listener, for only when you listen do you hear ideas different from your own. It’s very hard to learn something new when you are the one talking.

8. Thou shalt not try to relive yesterday for good or ill – it is gone. Concentrate on what is happening in your life today.

9. Thou shalt not cross bridges before you get to them, for no one yet has succeeded in accomplishing this.

10. Thou shalt face each problem as it comes. You can handle only one at a time – and when you do – share it with a God who loves and adores you – he can handle it!

That's are good advice for all of us. We gotta stop worrying so much.

If we can turn loose of worry and give it to God, it will help us to take life as it comes.

And in so doing have more energy and passion for being the hands and feet of God that we were created to be!

Amen...