

“Trust or Worry?”

Are We There Yet? Series

6th Sunday of Easter – Mother’s Day

In-person & Livestream

A professor at Texas A&M assigned the Sermon on the Mount as a reading for her composition class. One student responded, “It made me feel like I had to be perfect and no one is.” Another said, “The things asked in this sermon are absurd.” The professor described their comments as “a pristine response to the gospel, unfiltered through a two-millennia cultural haze.” Pastor James Harnish writes, “when we take Jesus’ words seriously, we’re sure to run head-on into something that disturbs our assumptions, disrupts our conscience, or destroys our overconfidence in our own goodness. It sounds downright absurd!” And yet, it’s a vision for those who would embrace God’s healing and transforming work in the world.

For the last month, we’ve asked a simple, but challenging question: *Are we there yet?* As we go back to the basics - the foundational teaching of Jesus - have we fully embraced it? Blessings that seem upside-down, values of the Kingdom, our impact on the world even in small ways (like salt and light), the challenge to consider our intentions and motivations behind our actions when it comes to our relationships with others and even when it comes to prayer. We’re not praying or fasting or doing our faith to get attention, but to praise God and to witness to others.

Jesus pulls all the punches and goes straight to the heart of what it means to follow him in Kingdom living. If we keep the theme of the road trip before us, today’s topic might be like GPS or a map to help us get where we’re going. (I can hardly remember what it’s like to navigate without a calm voice telling me where to turn!) Jesus tells us not to worry, but to trust in God. And I promise that it’s only coincidence that this falls on what is officially Mother’s Day.

Now I’ll confess that when I hear Jesus say, “don’t worry,” my immediate response is “Too late, Jesus!” I’m already a well-seasoned worrier; sometimes I even feel like a professional worrier - expert level. Perhaps you know what I mean. I can go to the next “What if?” scenario quickly and easily without missing a beat.

SHOW SLIDE: *What If?* cartoon

I have experience bypassing “what is” and going right for “what if” even when it’s not helpful, productive, or needed. It’s like I do it for fun!

Dr. Stephanie Margolese calls it the “dreaded ‘what if’ game” and invites us to name it that as a way to step back, press the pause button, and gain some perspective. Others suggest writing down our worries so we can deal with them in a healthier way -

allowing ourselves to talk through them - and perhaps offering them to God in prayer - and leaving them there. Professor Jenny Taitz says that it's a way to worry more mindfully - not allowing ourselves to confuse worrying with coping or planning, which can rob us of moments of peace. Even still, we have to pay attention to what Jesus says not to worry about - and there are specifics.

I have been good at worrying my whole life! I've shared how I practiced walking down my not very long driveway so I was ready when the bus came. Maybe you know what it's like to focus on what *could* happen and spend a lot of time and energy on that scenario instead of waiting to see what actually *does* happen. **SHOW SLIDE:** Woman w/ lines above head

Certainly, this past year plus has brought on new sources of worry and stress for many of us. The concerns are different, but the results are the same. Worry can make us feel distracted and scattered - unable to focus well and respond accordingly. We can get wrapped up in worry.

And it's not just about me or my own stuff. It's my family, friends, congregation, and the world. I find myself saying "Don't worry" a lot, especially to my children. But somehow, it's difficult to take my own counsel. I've discovered from talking to others that just because kids grow up, worries don't necessarily dissipate. They just look and feel different. I worry about other people, too. I worry about the present - and the future.

Don't worry about your life. Obviously, Jesus knows our tendency. Jesus knows that the more we worry, the more we worry. A simple truth, but important to admit. Jesus even tells me what I shouldn't worry about: food, drink, or clothes. He doesn't tell us to ignore them; they're important. Don't worry about the essentials - maybe because he knows we do. Don't worry about tomorrow - because we need to focus now.

Jesus doesn't call out worry as sin, but he does invite us to find the balance between caring deeply and trusting God's presence and care. Don't worry about the essentials or be overwhelmed by the future so much that fear and worry take the lead, but also plan, prepare, and be responsible. Put things in the proper perspective and priority. In all of it, seek God first. Remember God's place in all of it.

Jesus is an equal opportunity challenger. No one hears this and feels at ease. For those who are wealthy, there's a call to watch out for where we place our trust. For those who are poor, which was most likely the majority of those who heard him say these words, there's a call to trust God for what we need. Jesus is inviting everyone to find peace in God's tender and consistent care. We're all invited to embrace the Kingdom - this new way of life that puts more trust in God's eternal care than in stuff that doesn't last. That doesn't mean it's not important to have what we need.

And here's the truth: I know Jesus is right when he says that worry can't add anything to my life. Worry doesn't improve it. If I'm honest, worry doesn't do anything for quality. It's a total drag and a waste of time. **SHOW SLIDE:** Worry is a down payment on a problem you may never have. Joyce Meyer

Brittany Yesudasan writes, "Trusting God is not about ignoring your feelings or reality. It's not pretending that everything is OK when it isn't. Trusting God is living a life of belief in and obedience to God even when it's difficult." Trust in God doesn't discount reality, but it embraces it fully. That's what Jesus is getting at - to trust God in every moment of our lives. Trust isn't just for the good times when things are going well, but for every time, even when it's most difficult: when life didn't go as I planned, when I feel out of control, when I'm scared and overwhelmed, when there's no end in sight (we've felt that during this past year!), when we've been wronged and find it hard to trust. God can be trusted.

SHOW SLIDE: You can't trust God and worry at the same time. I wonder if worry is more passive, which is another reason Jesus tells us not to do it. Worry may seem like active work because it requires so much time and energy, but I wonder if worry is really more passive because we resign ourselves and sometimes find ourselves feel helpless - and passively waiting for something to happen. Perhaps trust in God is more active because we choose to place our trust in God's care - going against our tendency to worry and focus on what hasn't ever happened.

SHOW SLIDE: Worry implies that we don't quite trust that God is big enough, powerful enough, or loving enough to take care of what's happening in our lives. Francis Chan

Again, Jesus doesn't name worry as sin, but he calls us to pay attention to where we fall. Picture a seesaw with worry on one side and trust on the other. Which one is higher right now?

Worry puts the focus on us. Of course, we need to consider how we care for ourselves, but we can get very inwardly-focused really quickly without remembering that God is Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. Jesus tells us to seek God's Kingdom first and allow everything else to fall into place. This isn't a magic trick, but it's about serving God first and allowing God to shape our priorities and our whole lives - how we spend our time, energy, and money. Blessing isn't something we "get," but it's a way of living and perspective - Kingdom focused, with an awareness of God's presence, and seeking God's will.

God cares deeply for us and takes care of us. Jacob Armstrong says that Jesus sings a "don't worry song" over the people gathered when he spoke to remind them (and us) that God wants to give all that we need. God wants to *be* all that we need, but

worry can rob us of joy and peace that God wants to give. Our true treasure is found in God's presence with us in Jesus.

One of the gifts we give to children around us, the children we influence, is our witness of faith and trust. When we talk about and show the importance of our personal relationship with God, it matters. When we teach children through our actions what having faith in God really means, it matters. All of us are here because of someone's example of faith and trust in God - maybe a parent, but maybe another family member, friend, or church family member. Just as we have been given that gift, I pray that our trust in God is on full display for others to see.

"Christian faith is, in part, a matter of hoping. We believe in and trust the Lord of the future, and we lean into the future that God has promised. God goes before us, beckoning us into the new world that is already being created, calling us to join in the challenging work of fashioning it. However, when we're confronted with personal disasters or with the daily horror stories of society's ills, we may falter. Hope may seem to be unrealistic, naive optimism. Yet our hope is not in trends. Our hope is in the Lord of all creation and all history—a God who is still in charge and is actively at work transforming the world." Those words come from our United Methodist Church website - specifically addressing what we believe about the Kingdom of God. It's something we trust will come in its fullness, but it's also something we seek to build and bring right now using the faith we claim.

Trust or worry? Where do we fall today? Where is God calling us to trust more and worry less? I want to share a poem by Mary Oliver called "I Worried."

I Worried by Mary Oliver

I worried a lot. Will the garden grow, will the rivers
flow in the right direction, will the earth turn
as it was taught, and if not how shall
I correct it?
Was I right, was I wrong, will I be forgiven,
can I do better?
Will I ever be able to sing, even the sparrows
can do it and I am, well,
hopeless.
Is my eyesight fading or am I just imagining it,
am I going to get rheumatism,
lockjaw, dementia?
Finally I saw that worrying had come to nothing.
And gave it up. And took my old body

and went out into the morning,
and sang.

May we trust more than we worry. And the peace of God fill us.
Thanks be to God! Amen.