

Reflection on the Word: July 29, 2018 Proverbs 3:1-10; Matthew 6:25-34

A shooting rampage on the Danforth in Toronto leaves 2 dead, 13 wounded...

Wildfires put hundreds of people on evacuation alert in northern Ontario ...

White Helmets and their families are dramatically rescued from Syria, but fears remain for those left behind...

A senior couple, preparing to move into an apartment, anxiously await a buyer for their house ...

Everyday, in the world, in our community, in our personal lives, there is much that might cause us to worry. And the amount of energy that is expended in needless worry is astounding.

It's been said that an average person's anxiety is focused:

40% -- on things that will never happen

30% -- on the past that can't be changed

12% -- on criticism by others, mostly untrue

10% -- on health, which gets worse with stress

And 8% -- on real problems that will be faced

What is it that causes you to worry?

According to a survey by U.S.A. Today, Americans worry about work, money, children, health, marriage and parents. And I expect it's not much different for us Canadians. One in five Canadians say they would last less than a week before having to borrow money if they lost their job. I've read that one of the biggest worries among Canadians is high food prices. Many worry about looking their best, having the right outfit. And given the average age of people in this congregation, I would expect that worries about health, yours or a family member's, are fairly widespread.

Jesus said, "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothes?" Yet, we do worry, oh, how we worry.

The thing is, worry in and of itself, is not usually very productive. Unless our worry leads to some positive action, it becomes energy spent for nothing. Consider this quote: "Worry is like a good rocking chair. It gives you something to do, but it doesn't get you anywhere."

William Barclay reminds us that in his teaching, Jesus is not advocating, a thriftless, reckless, or thoughtless attitude to life; rather, he is forbidding a care-worn, worried fear, which takes all the joy out of life.

Many years ago, Mark Twain offered these words of wisdom, "I am an old man and have known a great many troubles, but most of them have never happened."

Obviously, worrying is not just a modern day problem, but something that has plagued generations of people before us. And that's why Jesus teaches a lesson about trusting in God's love and abundant grace. Using the example of birds and flowers, we are admonished to see how God cares for them, and to trust in God's care for each one of us as well. In this season of summer, as we delight in the rich colours of the natural world around us, we can understand the words of the gospel, "even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these."

How many of you remember the song made famous by Bobby McFerrin back in the 80's? Maybe you can help me. Can you snap your fingers? Ooh ooh ooh

*Here's a little song I wrote
You might want to sing it note for note
Don't worry, be happy
In every life we have some trouble
But when you worry you make it double
Don't worry, be happy*

Most of us wish it were that easy! But the truth is that almost all of us worry far too much. We worry about what we have done and what we have failed to do. We worry about what we have said ... and what we should have said. We worry about our children and grandchildren. We worry about our overall health, about weight gain and weight loss, about finances and the future. And if that weren't enough, a lot of us worry about worrying too much.

Jesus knew that excessive worry and anxiety can damage the human spirit and rob us of the joy God intended for us to experience in our lives. The reading from Proverbs admonishes us to "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge God, and he will make straight your paths." And in today's gospel, Jesus suggests a simple formula for keeping our worry under control.

He begins by suggesting that we learn to live one day at a time. He tells his disciples: "Tomorrow will be anxious for itself." We need to let go of our past with all its failures and disappointments, and our future that has not even arrived. So that we might concentrate on living in the here and now.

Jesus also taught that our priority is *not* the things of this world ... Our priority *is* putting our relationship with God, and his kingdom above all else, and trusting him to provide what it is that we need. Notice I said, what we "need", not what we "want".

"Seek God's kingdom first, and all these things will be given to you as well." Fifty years from now it's not going to matter if you get the grass cut, the laundry done or the beds made. It's not going to make any difference whether you wore the latest style. Your golf score is not going to determine your place in glory. But what will matter is the kindness you extended; the honesty by which you lived; the example you set.

One of my favorite stories is about the carpenter a woman hired to help her restore an old farmhouse. That carpenter had just finished a rough first day on the job: a flat tire made him lose an hour of work, his electric saw quit, and then his ancient pickup truck refused to start. The woman offered to drive him home, and during the ride, the carpenter sat in stony silence.

When they arrived at the carpenter's house, he invited the woman in to meet his family. As they walked toward the front door, the carpenter paused briefly at a small tree, touching the tips of the branches with both hands. And then he opened the door, and as he stepped across the threshold, he underwent an amazing transformation. His tanned face wreathed in smiles and he hugged his two small children and gave his wife a kiss.

Afterward he walked the woman back to her car. As they passed the tree the woman's curiosity got the better of her, and she asked the carpenter about what she had seen him do earlier.

"Oh, that's my trouble tree", he replied. "I know I can't help having troubles on the job, but one thing for sure, troubles don't belong in the house with my wife and the children. So I just hang them on the tree every night when I come home. Then in the morning I pick them up again."

"Funny thing is", he smiled, "when I come out in the morning to pick 'em up, there aren't nearly as many as I remember hanging up the night before."

Scripture, including today's lesson, affirms that God will see to our needs. And trusting in that, we can instead route our energies into being God's hands and feet in the world around us. We can be the instruments God uses to meet the basic needs for those who share our world.

It is a given that in life we will have our troubles, but we must trust that God has the power and the love both to help and to provide. In this season of summer, as we delight in the birds and the colorful blooms of flowers, may we be reminded of the gifts of life that God gives to us all. Because we do have a heavenly Father who cares for each one of us, and has promised that his grace is sufficient for our needs. Thanks be to God! Amen.