

anxiety problem manageable. Because Jesus entered creation and gave up all control. Jesus allowed himself to be led to a cross. He went from the centre of the universe holding all things together with the power of his Word to being naked and ashamed on a cross.

Does that mean Jesus is our model? Yes, he is that. But even more so, it means is that Jesus gave up control for us. It means Jesus faced our greatest fears of losing control so that he could be in control for us. In other words, he is our saviour from our greatest fear.

But this information is only helpful in so much as we apply it in our real lives. And that's just what we must do in light of our crucified Lord.

And the first thing we must do is reorient our priorities. Life is not about trying to be in complete control. Only God can do that. Our task is to keep your eyes upon Jesus – Because Jesus is in control.

C.S. Lewis once said, "If you read history you will find out that the Christians who did the most for the present world were precisely those who thought the most of the next. Aim at Heaven and you will get earth "thrown in". Aim at earth and you will get neither."

And what I think Lewis means is that when we are obsessed with the earthly problems we face, we end up overrun by worry, anxiety and fear. But when we look to God's heavenly reality, when we're focussed on Jesus who is on his throne, we see that nothing is out of control, nothing is hopeless, and we're not just left to fend for ourselves.

And so, once we've reframed out

priorities we are able to reframe your work. Because now we're not trying to work to secure our own future, to make something of ourselves, or to achieve our own success (a sure-fire recipe for anxiety). But we're working to build for Jesus – to bring the Kingdom of God into reality in our time and place. Making something of ourselves in no longer our concern but working for the purposes and plans of God takes all the pressure off!

And finally, once our priorities and work has been reframed, we can then relinquish the throne. Trying to be in control of things that you can't control makes you anxious. What's the answer? Give up trying to take the throne and live under the rule and reign of God who truly sees and knows all things.

Simply acknowledge that tomorrow's problems are tomorrow's problem. But we do not walk this road alone. So, there's no point in worrying about it. We walk boldly into the future knowing that we are not alone, and our guide sees all, knows all, and has dominion over all.

See, the problem of worry and anxiety is as much theological as it is psychological. And that's good news because we are children of the most high king and we worship the one who is on the throne.

Thanks be to God, Amen.

"The Sermon on the Mount: Worry-less"

June 18th, 2023 — Selby United Church – Scripture: Matthew 6:25-34

By Rev. Mike Putnam

The thing that makes

Christianity kind of strange in the realm of religious thought is that it works backwards. It's counter intuitive. It doesn't work the way we think it should.

Because Christianity doesn't begin with a God who gives you some rules and if you follow those rules, you will be saved. That would be what we'd expect. That would make sense to us.

But actually, it works in exactly the opposite way. Christianity begins with a God who saves us, he makes us his family, and then he raises us up as his children to live as the royalty we were always meant to be.

But see, that's really good news. In fact, it's the only way that would actually work. Because so long as we're white knuckling our way through life, trying to be good, trying to do the right things, we will always be frustrated that at times things seem to be going so well, and then at other times things seem to be a total mess. Because the problem of sin and evil cannot be so easily solved by trying a little harder and doing a little more. There's no evidence that that's a strategy proven to succeed.

And so, God's strategy doesn't work the way we think it should. He doesn't give us rules to see how good we can be, and those who make it get saved. But instead, God's begins with our hearts - transforming us through our hearts in the light of God's saving grace. And then our actions and life choices flow out of that

heart change. God is saving the world one heart and one mind at a time.

And so, this morning Jesus continues to offer us a vision for what that heart transformation will look like. "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body what you will wear."

But wait a second, isn't that the whole deal? Don't worry about my life? If I don't worry about my life, who will?

We live in a cultural moment defined by anxiety. I don't know if you've had a chance to work closely with young people lately, but if you do you will hear the word anxiety a lot! Anxiety defines and controls so many young lives today.

And you can read a mountain of psychiatric articles and papers about the problem and at the end it won't be entirely clear why that is! Some will tell you it has to do with social media and internet use. Others will say it's about loneliness and social alienation in our culture. Others will say the problem is artificial light and changing sleep patterns. Others will say the problem isn't new at all, we're just more aware of it today than in the past. And maybe, that's all true.

So many people today are awash in a sea of their own anxiety. Normal everyday activities like going to work, having social interactions, or being in a classroom setting seem like impossible obstacles to a happy and healthy life.

But it's not real good advice to just tell someone with anxiety, simply, "Don't worry." That would seem woefully

out of touch and even cruel. And so this is a subject that needs a little more thought. And thankfully, Jesus offers us some really helpful insights into the problem of worry, regardless of time or generation.

So first, Jesus addresses the reality of worry. In verse 25, 31, 34 Jesus gives us an instruction not to worry. Three times Jesus acknowledges that worrying is a problem. It was a problem 2000 years ago and it's a problem today.

In fact, worry isn't just a problem of the mind. Because stress and worry have physiological outcomes. People with anxiety face higher rates of heart disease, they experience neck and back pain, they suffer from headaches, and they can face panic attacks. But so often this physical manifestation of worry is dealt with chemically. We so quickly turn to pharmaceutical solutions.

But not only that, but whole industries have developed around stress relief – massage, spa treatments, chiropractors, essential oils, cosmetic treatments, yoga and diet supplements all promise the solution to your symptoms caused by worry. But what's not very common is trying to get under our worry. What's behind our anxiety?

And that brings us to the causes. And many studies have shown that social standing is a big source of stress in our modern lives. We tell our kids "You can be anything you want to be...now go make me proud!" But that leaves kids anxious! "Am I good enough?" "Am I living up to my full potential?" "Am I making something of myself?"

But on a more macro level,

studies have also shown that fears about the future, the economy, the unpredictability of our society, shootings and crime, what the next crazy politician is going to do to our country, is also a source of anxiety. "What's going to happen to us next?" "Is the world going to hell in a handbasket and am I going to have any control over any of it?"

But what does Jesus prescribe as the treatment for our worry? Does he offer some techniques and practices? Does he suggest some helpful supplements? Maybe you just need to diffuse some lavender oil and practice more deep breathing!

No Jesus says, "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them." Jesus wants us to look. He wants us to see something. He wants us to see how the world was designed to work.

What if our worry isn't primarily a physiological problem but it's a theological problem?

Now, we could easily misunderstand what Jesus is saying here. We could say, "Well, okay, I'll just do nothing. I'll just be a bird. I'll wait for the food to fall from the sky. I'll wait for God to just do everything for me. But don't misunderstand! This is not an instruction to not work, or plan, or make good choices for the future. But what Jesus is saying is that worrying about it is futile.

"Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself" he says. Because at the root of our anxiety is a desire to know something about tomorrow that is unknowable today.

Anxiety happens when we feel powerless to control what is in the future.

When the boss says, "I want you in my office first thing tomorrow morning" how do you feel? Anxious? Because you don't know what that meeting is about. It could be really good or it could be really bad. But you have no control over it. You are at the mercy of your boss. You might be getting a raise. You might be getting fired. You can't control that outcome at this point!

Why do doctor's visits, performance reviews and driving tests make us so nervous? Because we can't control the outcome. Someone else is in control!

And see, anxiety is caused by our desire for control. And we try really hard to be in control, don't we? But when I'm not in control I get nervous, anxious, and worried.

But see, this is a theological issue as much as it is a psychological one. Our anxiety causes us to try to take the place of God – to know what God knows, to see what God sees, to do what God does. But the more you try to be God the more anxious we get.

God gives us power and dominion over certain things but not all things. Adam and Eve were given dominion over the Garden of Eden – they were to be custodians of creation. But God doesn't relinquish control and leave Adam and Eve to their own plans. Instead, God is present and is depicted walking with them in the Garden – giving them guidance and guard rails for living.

So, what's the cure for worry?

Well, Jesus says three times not to worry. But is that something you can be commanded to do? Isn't that like telling someone to be happy? Look on the bright side, just come up with a plan, be a little more organized and everything will be fine! But that advice will probably actually make you more anxious! It's just one more thing you need to do to take control of and deal within your own life.

You know, study after study has found something that really irritates those who suggest that the world is better without religion. It turns out that people of faith are significantly better off when it comes to anxiety. More than thirty-two independent studies have found that religion in general, religious training, spirituality, faith, prayer, religious community and worship were directly associated with reduced anxiety and healthier living.

Jesus says, "Look at the birds of the air...your Father feeds them." He says, "Look at how the flowers of the field grow... will he not much more clothe you?"

Anxiety comes from not knowing the future. It come when we feel like we're not in control. The antidote comes not from trying a little harder and doing a little more, but from simply knowing that God is in control. It comes from being able to say "some things are unknowable...and there's nothing good going to come from worrying about it. I'm going to put it in God's hands and trust that I am at the top of his list."

But Jesus in particular gives us something even better to make our