



Roanoke, Virginia

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“Let Go, Let God”

Matthew 6:25-34

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Today’s scripture reading is a passage taken from the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus addresses a large crowd gathered on a mountainside near the Sea of Galilee and teaches them about discipleship. In our text, Matthew 6:25-34, Jesus teaches his followers not to worry but to trust in God and to seek his kingdom. Hear now the word of our Lord:

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 life not 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 can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?

And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, and yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today, and tomorrow thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore, do not worry, saying “What shall we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear?” For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

For most of my adult life, God and I have been having a conversation in which I pray something like this: Dear God, I did it again. Instead of turning things over to you and trusting you,



once again, I relied only on myself. Please help me stop worrying, to “be still and know that you are God,” and trust in your will, not mine.” But inevitably, when another occasion arises and I take things into my own hands without turning to God, I pray this same prayer again, without making much progress on this spiritual discipline.

Consider the day a few years ago, shortly after I had retired from Hollins, when my 90-year-old dad had to have his pacemaker replaced. I was determined to be with him for the procedure. However, my parents insisted I not drive to Pittsburgh where they lived. Mom promised she would call after the surgery was over and my dad was alert. We estimated that it would be around eleven. The day of the surgery arrived. At 11:15 that morning, after not hearing anything, I started to worry. I checked the phone to be sure it was on; it was. Still hearing nothing at 11:30, I tried to call my mom, but she didn’t answer. I went from worrying to worrying in overdrive, and I started packing my bag to drive to Pittsburgh. At 11:45 and still no word, I packed a bag of snacks for the trip. As I became increasingly frantic, with still no news, I decided it was time to get in the car and drive to Pittsburgh.

At the first stop sign, I remembered I was supposed to pray not to worry but to just turn this over to God. Hurriedly, I halfheartedly offered that prayer but then noticed I was out of gas and sped to the gas station. Still no news from Pittsburgh. At the gas station, I jumped out of the car, refueled and rushed to get my credit card out of my wallet. To my alarm, the car door wouldn’t open. Looking in the window, I saw my purse containing my wallet and my phone out on the console. I realized I had accidentally locked them in the car. Panicked, after apologizing for tying up the gas pump since I couldn’t drive my car or pay for the gas, I begged the attendant to use his phone to call my husband, which he kindly loaned me. However, in my frenzied state, I could not remember David’s cell number. In fact, the only number I could remember was the number for my old office at Hollins, so I called it. Luckily, my former assistant answered, and I sheepishly told her what had happened. She gave me David’s number, I called him, and he agreed to come to rescue me. After returning the borrowed phone to the attendant, with my anxiety growing with every minute, I decided to try to pry open the door of the car while I waited on David.

Before I got too far, I glanced into the car and at that moment, my phone was lighting up with my parents’ number illuminating the phone. Seeing the long-awaited call come through in my locked car set me off even more. Luckily, before I did something else, David arrived and we were able to retrieve the message my parents had left, calmly telling me that they had tried to reach me but wanted me to know the procedure had gone well and my dad was doing just fine. Once again, rather than placing my trust in God, I had taken things into my own hands and managed to get myself so worked up, I could not think straight. Nor was I able to be there for my parents when they expected me to be available. So much for helping my parents or following Jesus’ teaching “not to worry.”

In his book, *Jesus Is the Question*, Martin Copenhaver observes that “Jesus longest discourse on human emotion is about worry—It is clear from Jesus’ attention to the subject that worry has



been an unwelcome guest in human hearts and minds from the very beginning.”¹ And indeed, we worry: we worry about what we will have for dinner, what to wear, something we said or should have said, our health, whether we have enough money, the divisions in our country, the problems of the world, and each of you has your own worry list.

But in today’s passage, Jesus tells us three separate times not to worry. He underscores this point by asking a series of five rhetorical questions: “Is life not more than food and the body more than clothing? Are you not of more value than the birds of the air? Can any of you worry by adding a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? 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?” These rhetorical questions are intended to challenge us not to worry and to reassure us that God loves us and cares for this world. While there is more than enough to worry about in the world today, Jesus tells us to stop worrying. God promises to love and care for us. Let your worries go and let God handle it.

But choosing not to worry is easier said than done. How can we not be anxious in a worry producing world? Whether our worries are driven by fear, insecurity, uncertainty, or a desire to control things, it is hard to release our worries. As author Brian McLaren points out in, *We Make the Road by Walking*, “Our anxieties show us how little we trust God—” It is as if we think “God must be either so incompetent or uncaring that we might end up miserable or starving or naked or dead.”² So we worry and worry as if “anxiety might somehow make us taller, thinner, better looking, better dressed or more healthy.”³

Rather than placing our trust in the Father, secure that the triune God will be with us regardless of what the outcome of a certain situation may be, we get ourselves so worked up that we may even do harm. Consumed by worry, we may cling so much to someone we love so that it is counterproductive or even hurtful. In our anxious state, we may overcomplicate problems and be unable to think straight. We worry about things beyond our control and miss those things within our control. In my incident involving my dad’s pacemaker, my fearfulness caused me and others needless anxiety and prevented me from being able to support my parents emotionally when they needed me. Too often, we try to figure things out on our own rather than trusting in God and we end up so stirred up that we are unable to do what we actually could do to help ourselves or others.

I am reminded of a conversation I had with a senior member of my staff at Hollins. At a regular one-on-one meeting, we discussed a significant issue confronting us and I asked Patty a series of questions about what she had done to address the problem, one after the other in rapid fire succession. Have you done this? Thought about that? Consulted so and so? Suddenly, Patty became noticeably quiet, looked directly at me and asked, “Don’t you trust me?” She stopped me

¹ Copenhaver, Martin. *Jesus Is the Question*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2024, p. 45.

² McClaren, Brian D., *We Make the Road by Walking*. New York: Jericho Books, 2014, p.140-41.

³ *Ibid*, p 141



cold. I realized that not only was I not helping her solve the problem, but I was not behaving like I trusted her. Without trust, neither of us could do our best work. And that experience taught me something about trusting God.

When we try to take everything into our own hands, when we are fearful and uncertain about the outcome, we crowd out God. When we are angry about what we think God is allowing to happen, we forget that while the sovereign God may be a mystery, God loves us and loves us all the time. When we are anxious, relying only on ourselves and failing to trust God, we are unable to love others as Jesus taught us to do. Jesus tells us not to worry, implying that we should take a deep breath and turn our troubles over to God, placing our trust in him.

Even as we do our best to surrender our personal worries to God, we look around and see hungry and homeless people in Roanoke, in our nation, and throughout the world. It is hard to understand why we should not worry about where their next meals will come from or where they will lay their heads. Where is God for them? Has our holy Father abandoned them? Perhaps it is not ours to understand how God works but to accept the divine mystery. As Barbara Brown Taylor writes in *The Preaching Life*, “When we forget who we are, our Lord reminds us: we are the people who live by the grace of God alone, by trusting in God’s providence and by remembering that we are more, far more, than what we consume, what clothes we wear, or where we may live. We may care for ourselves and care for others, but it is God who cares for us all—There is no “us or them” out there, just us, all of us, lined up on the same side of God’s counter. Some have more than others, but we are all blessed, all called to bless one another. We can serve the God who feeds and clothes and shelters by doing some of that ourselves, but always with the knowledge that it is God who provides—God in whose home there is plenty for the birds of the air, for the lilies of the field and for every one of us.”⁴

Rather than worry about what we do not understand and cannot control, as children of God, we can do our part to seek the kingdom of heaven on earth, as Jesus instructs us to do. The life of faith requires us, in Jesus’s words, to “strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness.”⁵ Jesus introduced us to the kingdom of God in his ministry as he healed the sick, loved his enemies and trusted in the Father. Jesus taught his followers that we, too, were expected to seek God’s kingdom on earth. A few verses before our passage in Matthew, Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray to the Father, saying “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”⁶ The kingdom of God is not just a heavenly paradise we strive to enter when we die, but a reality God intends to bring about right here in the present. Not only does Jesus tell us not to worry, but he instructs us to strive first for the kingdom of God on earth. Right here. Right now.

⁴ Taylor, Barbara Brown. *The Preaching Life*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993, pp.166-167.

⁵ Matthew 6:33

⁶ Matthew 6:10



According to Brian McLaren, “Jesus makes this staggering promise: if we seek God’s kingdom and justice first, everything we need—financially, physically, socially—will be given to us. When we focus anxiously on our own wellbeing without concern for our neighbor—everyone is worse off.”⁷ We can defeat worry by seeking first the kingdom of God. Living in faith means we trust in God’s abundance and collaborate and share; we watch out for each other and trust in God’s love for all of us.

Even so, God does not always respond as we might hope or expect. There are times and situations when even as we try to turn our troubles over to God and love others, God does not seem to hear our prayers or respond as we expect our loving, all powerful God to do. In her book, *How we Learn to be Brave*, Mariann Edgar Budde describes a sermon Peter Gomes at Harvard preached in which he told the story of Ernest Gordon, the author of *Through the Valley of the Kwai*, about his captivity in a Japanese prison camp during World War II, later made into the movie, *The Bridge over the River Kwai*. Initially, Gordon and his fellow captives tried hard not to worry but to trust in God, reading their Bibles, praying and expecting God to free them, especially given their faithfulness. But their suffering dragged on, and God did not deliver them as they had prayed. The men became angry and abandoned any attempt at piety and gave up on God saving them. However, as the men increasingly cared for each other, they quietly began to speak of God in their midst. As Gomes observed, theirs was “the discovery of faith that was not what you believed but what you did for others when it seemed you could do nothing at all.”⁸ Faith returned to them because of their compassion for others, as they leaned into believing that God was with them in their suffering.

God has enabled us to bear the unbearable and do the undoable, to pass the breaking point and not to break. Our worry is unnecessary. Instead, as Jesus tells us, “Strive for the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” God is with us, even when we cannot understand what is happening or why. Rather than trying to handle everything on your own, turn to God and release your worries, so that you can focus on loving those in your path.

As we relinquish our concerns to God, we can trust that God will be with us as we strive to love others and advance the kingdom of God. No matter what tomorrow brings, God will be with us. Handle the demands of each day as it comes, without worrying about tomorrow and things that may never happen, trusting that no matter what, God will be with you. Let go, Let God and Love each other.

⁷ McLaren p.141

⁸ Budde, Mariann Edgar Budde. *How We Learn To Be Brave*. New York: Avery Book, 2023, p. 175

