

Don't Worry, Be Happy
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Based on Luke 12:29-40
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In the late 1980s Bobby McFerrin recorded a song called, "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.
Don't worry, be happy now...

It was a catchy little ditty, but let's be honest: who really buys that? Don't worry?!?! All of us worry about something. We stress about our health, our family members, our jobs, our finances – you name it. To stress about life is to be human. We are hard-wired for it. And when we aren't worried, then we begin to worry about what we have forgotten to worry about! Someone once said that worry is like a rocking chair: it gives you something to do, but it doesn't get you anywhere.

The Biblical word for worry means "to choke or to strangle." When we allow worry to take over our lives it is as if we live with a noose around our neck. The more we worry, the tighter the noose becomes.

In the gospel today, Jesus says, "Don't worry about everyday life... Your Father already knows your needs." We know that is true. In faith we believe that God is watching out for us. After all, we are God's children. A faithful Father would do nothing less than watch over us and provide for our needs. God knows what we need and has already begun to put things into place to make things happen.

It's quite easy to stand up here and state that obvious fact. But to actually *live* as though it is true, that's another story. Instead of trusting in God and living by faith, instead of releasing our grip from the steering wheel of life and allowing God to drive, we clutch that wheel for dear life and worry what's up ahead.

We worry. We stress. And it affects all parts of life.

To help us overcome our natural tendency to worry, Jesus tells us to remember how valuable we are. Earlier in the 12th chapter of Luke, Jesus draws our attention to the ravens of the air and the lilies of the field. Neither of them worries about the things of everyday life. Why? Because God provides their food and their beauty. For them, it's a given.

And, Jesus reminds us, because we are made in the image of God, our life is much more valuable than any raven or lily. So if God provides everything for the ravens and the lilies, can we even begin to imagine how incredibly God will provide for us?

One day two birds were people watching up in the tree. One bird said to the other, “I wonder why those people rush around so anxiously and worry all the time? The other bird replied, “They must not know a heavenly Father like the One who cares for you and me.”

Never forget: The love God has for us is beyond words. God’s greatest joy is to bless us. When needs arise, God’s gracious hand is the first to provide. When troubles come, God is always close by. Never forget how valuable you are to God. Never forget God’s promise to provide.

All of this talk about worry leads to an obvious question: “Why is Jesus so concerned about our anxious heart?” It’s because an anxious heart hinders us from doing that which God created us to do. When we worry, all of our focus is inward. It’s all about us. We go into survival mode. Our every thought and choice is to ensure that *we* have everything we need, whatever comes.

That’s the exact opposite of how Jesus calls us to live. Because God has assured us that he will provide for our every need, because we no longer have to concern ourselves with the everyday worries of life, we are now free to put our energy and focus elsewhere – namely, to discern the will of God and to live it out in daily life.

So what is the will of God? Jesus gives us some clues in the gospel today. In the 12th chapter of Luke Jesus paints the world the way God sees it and then invites us to gaze at the canvas.

We quickly discover that there is a profound difference in the way God sees the world and the way we see it. God envisions a world where we share our abundance with those in need. God imagines a world where believers are always ready and willing to serve others. God sees a world where the light of our faith is shining continuously, that others may come to know Christ.

Those are pretty strong marching orders. It’s a world where there is unfailing faithfulness and commitment. Truth be told, when we become a follower of Jesus Christ, he places some rather high demands upon us. From the moment we are baptized, Jesus asks us to make a commitment.

Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Many in the church see it as a dirty word. Commitment. Sure, I’ll be a member, but don’t expect a huge commitment from me; I’ll do what I can. I’ll help out at any event, as long as it doesn’t interfere with my schedule. I’ll give to any need, if I have money left over at the end of the month. I’ll openly talk about my faith, as long as I’m certain I won’t offend anyone. Those are all excuses I have made, and I’m sure you have, too.

We offer our lives to God in the spirit of scarcity rather than in the spirit of generosity. Although God held nothing back for us – generously and freely giving us more than we ever deserved – we hold back plenty when it comes to offering our lives back to God. Our desire to live by faith and with a giving spirit quickly gets overrun by our need to make sure everything is taken care of in our little corner of the world. We forget the big picture. We forget that our lives are not the center of the universe. We forget to see the world as God sees it.

Jesus is teaching us that every moment of each day provides an opportunity for us to love and serve the Lord. Christ says, “I want your whole life. I want your whole heart. I want everything you do and say to reflect my Father’s love.” Jesus reminds us that we – you and I – are the ones who will bring forth the kingdom of God here on earth. We will do that by modeling our life after the life of Jesus. We are to be the hands and feet of Christ in this world. If Christ did it, then we are to do it. That is the life to which Jesus calls us.

I imagine it would be nice to be a part of a church that asked for no commitment from its members. No estimate of giving card. No Time and Talent sheet. No Church Council positions. Unfortunately, a church that asks for no commitment wouldn’t be a Christian church, for at the very center of the Christian faith is the word commitment.

The very foundation of the Christian faith is, of course, Jesus, and his whole life was defined by commitment. Jesus committed his whole life to sharing God’s love and ultimately saving the world. Jesus did whatever was necessary to right our relationship with God – even when it meant enduring the cross.

So our lives, too, must be defined by our commitment to God. We must be people willing to commit ourselves to the work of God’s kingdom, no matter what the sacrifice, no matter what the cost.

One of the biggest problems in the church today is that everyone assumes that someone else will do it. We assume that enough other people will fund a certain ministry so we don’t give. We assume that someone more gifted than us will agree to serve, so we don’t bother to volunteer. When there is a council position to fill, an event to plan, or volunteers needed, we are pre-programmed to say, “Someone else will do it.”

I am saddened to have to inform you of the sudden and unexpected death of one of our congregation’s most active members named, “Someone Else.” The passing of Someone Else creates a vacancy in our church that will be very difficult to fill, because Someone Else did far more than a normal person’s share of the work. Someone Else always gave funds for important ministries. Someone Else was always the first to volunteer. Someone Else was always willing to take food and offer hugs to those going through difficult times. Truth be known, everybody expected way too much from Someone Else.

In his letter to the Ephesians, the 4th chapter, St. Paul reminds us that God has given each one of us a special gift in order to build up the church and to bless the world. Each and

every one of us has a gift that this church needs to be all that God is calling us to be. It's not Someone Else's gift; it's **your** gift. It's a gift that no one else can offer but you.

In the gospel today, when Jesus instructs us to "be dressed for service and keep your lamps burning," Jesus is challenging us to discern what gifts God has entrusted to us, and then to boldly find ways to shine the light of our God-given gifts in our daily lives. If each and every one of us is not offering our gifts in some way, then we are short-changing God. We are not being the full people of God that God has created us to be in this place at this time in God's unfolding plan.

My hope is that we will be a Lutheran congregation known for the way that all of us claim the demanding work of faith to which Christ calls us. My prayer is that we will be a congregation who understands that our calling as children of God will not always be easy, or convenient, but the rewards will be out of this world.

Jesus says, "You – yes, **you** – will bring forth the kingdom of God here in this place by modeling your life after mine. So get to work," Christ says. Be my hands and my feet in your neighborhood, in your workplace, in your school, at the lake, on the golf course – wherever you find yourself.. Never miss an opportunity to share God's love with someone. Be bold in sharing your faith that others might come to know the saving message of Jesus Christ.

So get to work, Christ says. Get dressed for service, let your faith light shine, for there is still much to be done. The fulfillment of God's kingdom won't become fully realized unless we let our light so shine before others that they see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven.

Let it be so. Amen.