



November 21, 2021

Do not be anxious...

Do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life 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 which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life?

I think Jesus' words are among the most beautiful and comforting in all of scripture. Three times he says, "Do not be anxious." Clearly, he is speaking to us, living as we do in what poet W. H. Auden called, "The Age of Anxiety." We worry about things.

So, Jesus says what we long to hear, "Do not be anxious."

He goes on to tell us why we can let go of our worry. He points to the way in which God cares for God's creatures. He reminds us of God's faithfulness, which is constant and reliable: "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them... Commenting on this passage, Martin Luther once wrote, "Lovely lilies, how you rebuke our foolish nervousness."

These are not only words of comfort. They are words of challenge because they refuse to sanction our worry. A minister of the last century, E. Stanley Jones, put it starkly. He said, "Worry is atheism."

So, if worry is atheism, when Jesus says, "Do not be anxious," those are not just comforting words, those are challenging words. If worry is a sign of our lack of faith, then when Jesus says, "Do not be anxious," that is not just a reassurance, that is also something of a rebuke. You cannot pray and worry at the same time.

If you dig down to the root meaning of the word "worry" you will find that its literal meaning is "to strangle." When life gets us by the throat

the chances are that it is worry that is strangling us. Our stress-torn lives seem to say: 'There is no God! Or, if there is, I cannot trust God. I have to carry all burdens and work out all problems alone.'"

The spiritual antidote to worry is gratitude. German mystic Meister Eckhart wrote, "If the only prayer you ever say in your whole life is "thank you," that would suffice. In that same spirit, Anne Lamont observed, "The movement of grace toward gratitude brings us from the package of self-obsessed madness to a spiritual awakening. Gratitude is peace."

Give yourself and the people you love the gift of peace this Thanksgiving. Pray often and simply, "thank you."

In the Peace of Christ,
Pastor Bill

Rev. William P. Worley, PSE Conference Minister



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