

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday November 24, 2024 based on the Thanksgiving lessons and Jesus call to "not worry". Matthew 6:25-33

Thomas Oden, a Methodist Theologian, in his book called Structure, described humans as always living in the present time with both a past and a future. He claims we often feel guilty about the past because we cannot change it, and that we experience anxiety about the future because we cannot control it. Thus, an unchangeable past leads to guilt, and an uncontrollable future leads to anxiety.

To tell someone not to worry when they are anxious never seems to help. But what if it is Jesus, our God in human flesh, who teaches his followers, who were concerned about their next meal and clothing, not to worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will have enough worries of its own? But instead to seek God's kingdom first... to strive for the kingdom values Jesus brought to earth of love for the neighbor, justice, and mercy... and all the things will be given unto us as well.

I know when I have the rare moment of taking the focus off myself and serving others, especially those who are grieving, or in need of healing, or those who are hungry, it changes me and my outlook. It is no longer about living up to pressures and tensions of our world... or the pursuit of unlimited security for my future... but about walking with a person in need.

In our gospel for today from the sermon on the mount and Matthew 6:25 through 34, Jesus throws us worriers a lifeline. He wants his followers to retrain our minds from a place of excessive worry about the future to trust in God who daily provide for all creatures and knows all of our needs already. God's dream is that all people are fed and clothed safe water, affordable housing, healthcare.

Jesus then tells us to look at nature... to consider the birds of the air and the flowers in the fields and how God provides for them daily. They don't think of an unlimited future. Let them teach us to live in the moment. And if God takes care of them, won't God take care of us too. Through Jesus' life, death and resurrection, we have been granted an immeasurable worth as children of God and have a future with hope already prepared for us... now and after we die.

Excessive worry is inappropriate for followers of Jesus. We cannot add a single hour to our lives by worrying. We are to act differently from unbelievers who do not trust in a provident God. Instead, we are to seek first the kingdom of God and God's justice... to give priority to God's agenda of justice and mercy for, and in the process, we will discover that our needs will be met as well... because then all will be fed and clothed.

For many of us who have full pantries and freezers with food and closets full of clothes, we worry more about the future and things like affordable housing, jobs, violence in our communities, volatility in financial markets, natural disasters, wars, and politics shifting in America.

Jesus knows that we have enough troubles and problems in our current day to occupy our full attention. That's where learning to be thankful for the smallest blessings or details each day, knowing that Jesus won't abandon us and has promised us a future with him to the end of the age.

Finally, let us live into the trust that Jesus invites us into today. Let us strive for God's kingdom to become a reality among us. And as many of us give thanks around the dinner table this week, let us remember that the word, Eucharist, means thanksgiving. The root word is Charis in Greek which means grace. We celebrate or give thanks for God's grace every week in Holy Communion. There The guilt of the past is forgiven and a future of hope with Christ is present now in simple bread and wine. Amen