

# St. Mary's Sermons

Matthew 6:25-34

Do not worry

19/2/17

This week's lectionary reading continues to look at different sections from the Sermon on the Mount. Last week's passage, which included Jesus teaching on adultery and divorce, was to say the least, a very uncomfortable section to deal with, because we live in a society which takes a much more liberal view on these matters than Jesus did. So, I must admit that I was rather relieved when I found out that I was not preaching on that particular passage. Honestly, I did not do it deliberately!

I'm pleased to say that this week's theme: *"Do not worry"*, is a much easier passage to preach on. Or is it? On reflection, this command is not as simple and straightforward to put into practice as it might appear. It occurs to me that it is only natural for us to worry and that anxiety and depression are major issues for our society, which have a drastic effect on the health of many people today. When I was researching this topic on the internet I came across an article in a blog by someone called Henrik Edberg. He wrote:

*"One of the most common and destructive daily habits that people get caught up in, certainly must be the habit of worrying. It has been one of my biggest issues. And I know from my inbox that so many struggle with this.*

*But instead of doing what I usually do and collecting the best habits and tips that have helped me I'd like to do something different today.*

*I'd like to share 25 of the best, most empowering and inspiring quotes from the past few thousands of years about worrying and what to do about it."*

*Don't worry, I'm not going to quote all twenty five of them this morning: these were his top five:-*

1. *“Worry never robs tomorrow of its sorrow, it only saps today of its joy.”*  
– **Leo F. Buscaglia**
2. *“Worry often gives a small thing a big shadow.”*  
– **Swedish Proverb**
3. *“If you want to test your memory, try to recall what you were worrying about one year ago today.”*  
– **E. Joseph Cossman**
4. *“People become attached to their burdens sometimes more than the burdens are attached to them.”*  
– **George Bernard Shaw**
5. *“Our fatigue is often caused not by work, but by worry, frustration and resentment.”*  
– **Dale Carnegie**

I wonder what you make of that list. Personally, I don't find any of them very helpful at all. In my experience, recognising that *worrying about something is futile* does not help very much to stop you worrying about it! While it is easy to understand that many people in our society today are worried about all sorts of things, the question that I want us to address today is: Are we, as believers in the living, all powerful God, any different from those who are not Christians, when it comes to dealing with worry? If we are honest, while we know in theory that our faith should make a difference and that we should not be afraid about anything, I rather suspect that, in reality, we are often no better than the rest of society in coping with it. Just because many of those we come into contact with worry, does not mean to say that we should let their worries rub off on us!

So, what do you worry about? Your family, your health, your appearance, other people's perception of you, being made redundant, whether you will have enough money to pay all the bills, what the future holds, the state of the world? There is an almost endless list of possible things that potentially we could worry about.

I am only to aware that I have defiantly not got this area of my life totally sorted and that I still have a lot to learn. I am sure you will not be surprised to

learn that, at the moment, I am worried about Di. It's not nice seeing her doubled over, in constant pain, unable to walk, or sit, or sleep, properly or do many of the things that she wants to do. I feel so hopeless because I am not able to help her. One of the most frustrating aspects of the situation is, not knowing how long it will be before she receives the operation that she really needs.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus makes it very clear that God knows the minutest details of our lives. He spells it out very clearly indeed. He reminds us that God cares for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field and that if he provides for them, we can be completely confident that he will care and provided for our daily needs as well because we are much, much more valuable than the birds and the lilies. Please don't mishear me; Jesus is not saying that food and clothes don't matter at all, simply that they should never be our top priority.

When we worry about something, it shows that we do not really trust that God genuinely love us and has our best interests at heart, and that He has the power to deal with every eventuality. Jesus reminds us that our number one top priority should always be to seek God's kingdom first. I don't know about you but I find that to be a real challenge!

The good news, for those who believe in Him, is that God has also provided us with a much better way of dealing with worries than simply the power of positive thinking, which is adopted with varying degrees of success by many people today. That way of course is to take our worries to Him in prayer. In

**Philippians 4** Paul wrote, *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”* We do not have to carry our burdens ourselves, as that lovely old hymn, *“What a friend we have in Jesus”*, reminds us.

Rather we can take all our concerns, big and small to God, knowing that he will listen to us. That does not, of course, mean that he will instantly solve all our problems and answer our prayers in the way that we would like. Prayer is certainly not a magic wand that we can simply wave and hey presto our problems disappear. Often prayer is a battle, as we consciously struggle to submit our hopes and fears to God and accept his lordship of our lives. Jesus modelled this approach to prayer for us in the garden of Gethsemane, where he was desperate to avoid the cup of suffering but ultimately submitted to God’s will and not his own.

Paul goes on immediately after telling us to present our requests to God to make a quite amazing promise, *“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”*. When we are committed to living God’s way, even in the midst of the most terrible crisis of our lives, deep down we will still have the unshakable assurance that even if the worst does happen, God will not abandon us and He will be there for us. More than that, he will not only give us the strength that we need to face the situation but he will also give us the ability to continue to trust that he is a good father and ultimately knows what is best for us.

While it is never easy to cope when things go wrong in our lives, it is often at these times that our faith grows the most and we are able to witness

effectively to those around us about the difference that following Jesus does make.

And finally, I like what Tom Wright says in his commentary on this passage: *“Living totally without worry sounds, to many people, as impossible as living totally without breathing. Some people are so hooked on worry that if they haven’t got anything to worry about, they worry that they have forgotten something. Here at the heart of the Sermon on the Mount is an invitation that surprisingly few people even try to take up. Why not learn how to share the happiness of Jesus himself?”*