Luke 12:22-34 Rev. Jonathan E. Scharf

8/13/17 Proper 14C

**“Don’t worry.”**

I am sorry. I am sorry for not talking about money today. Our text has that great line – “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” – so it’s a natural time to talk about greed and the antidote to greed - generosity and the importance of showing what is your real treasure as you give your offerings to God’s work. I could talk about that today, but I’m not going to do it. Not today. And it’s not because I’m scared that people might think this church is just in it for your money. You know better than that. It’s because that lack of trust in God that shows itself in your weak offerings is just one of many symptoms. Today – Jesus points us to the cause.

 Brothers and sisters in Christ,

On June 6th, 1983, the cover of Time Magazine had a picture of a man screaming in frustration and big bold white block letters across the top that said, “STRESS!” The article called stress “The Epidemic of the Eighties,” and referred to it as our leading health problem. But, thanks to that article and then thanks to Bobby McFerrin, who in 1988 sang “Don’t worry, be happy” - all is solved, right? Aren’t you glad you live more than a generation after stress was such a problem, where stress is now a thing of the past?

Rrrrright. You know as well as I do that stress has not gone away. In fact, now doctors are talking about even such things as *childhood* stress. They are worrying about the stress levels for your kids, which usually spikes right around this time of year, they say, with school starting and all. Come on! What do kids have to be worried about? But apparently they are worrying. And so are 87% of you right now, according to the statistics, even though you know just as well as I do that stress isn’t good for us. According to the American Institute of Stress, between 75 and 90 percent of all visits to primary care physicians are for stress related problems. Our bodies were wonderfully designed to go on high alert when threatened, raising the blood pressure and heartrate to be ready to fight, taking attention away from things like the digestive and immune systems, so that the body can be focused to face the danger in that moment. But when there isn’t a physical danger you are reacting to, when you are worrying about something you can’t physically do anything about, stress tells the body it always has to be on high alert. And then our bodies don’t work right. They can’t handle the constantly elevated heart rate and blood pressure. They need their digestive and immune systems to be working full force, instead of being put on hold. Constant stress is bad.

You’d think we would figure this out. It should be a no-brainer when Jesus tells us **“Don’t worry.”** But he obviously knew we’d struggle with this because he kept repeating it and using picture after picture to illustrate why. Just in chapter 12 of Luke alone, he has already said we don’t have to worry because God cares so much about us he even knows how many hairs are on our heads. He told his disciples not to worry about what to say when they were arrested and put on trial because the Holy Spirit was with them and would give them the words. And he told the story of the rich man who was worried about his possessions but not about his relationship with God and how that all turned out. Jesus’ message has been clear, “Don’t worry about stuff.” And that’s all before our text even starts. You see that’s why Jesus starts his words in our text with that word “**Therefore**” – because of all the stuff he’s been saying. In other words, because that’s all true - **Do not worry.**

And he breaks down the things we don’t have to worry about and why. Look at verse 22, **“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear.”** He said that 2,000 years ago. You’d think we would get it through our heads by now about that. Whether it is dad paying the bills worrying that he can’t make ends meet or the kids worrying about their back-to-school clothes being fashionable enough, or the woman looking at her overstuffed closet saying, “What am I going to wear?!” Jesus says, “Don’t do it!” If you are worried about having the right look to fit in with your neighbors or the best things so that others don’t look down on you… if you are worried about your health or who might be mad at you or if you are attractive enough, Jesus says “DON’T!”

Maybe we should look at why he says not to worry about that stuff. Verse 23, **“For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes.”** The stuff we are worrying about is not really even the important stuff. **“Consider the ravens** (he says, the unclean, nuisance animal ravens): **They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!**

And then he takes another picture. **“Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.** Solomon had the best of everything money could buy, and he wasn’t as pretty as one of these (flowers). And these flowers will be dead within the week. Look at what Jesus says, **“How much more will he clothe you – you of little faith!”**

Ouch. Did you see what he did there? He brought your faith into this. In other words, worrying is not just some little vice or inconvenience that really isn’t very good for you but can’t really do any harm. No – he *contrasted* worry with faith. Worry, stress, is sin – it’s a sign of arrogance – that we somehow think we can control things that we have no authority over. In fact, he says, worry is a sign that your faith is under attack. Look at verses 29-30. If you are setting your heart on, if you are stressing over, what you will eat or drink – you are acting like a pagan, he says, like you don’t believe that God your heavenly Father can handle it. Or maybe it’s that you think he doesn’t know about your need. Either way, it’s not trusting him and who he is, and that is a dangerous place to be. High blood pressure is the least of your problems then.

And as soon as it sets in what that means, the wrath and fear that should bring, realize that God has taken care of that reason to worry too. Look at verse 32. Right after showing how incompatible worry is with faith, right after exposing your sin so grotesquely, Jesus covers you right back up with his promise: **“Do not be afraid, little flock** (and those images of our Good Shepherd come flooding in from Psalm 23 and John 10 with Jesus carrying us lambs in his arms and laying down his life for the sheep.) **Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.”**

To us who insult him with our worry and rob him of glory when we stress, he is pleased - it is his pleasure – it makes him happy - to give *us* the kingdom. Why? That’s the mind-blowing part. That’s his love. We continually show how we don’t deserve it. But he gives us the kingdom, a gift.

In our 2nd lesson this morning, we had the story of Abraham. God, out of the blue, called him and told him to go to a land he would give him, not because Abraham worked for it but because God wanted to give it. And so Abraham left everything and he went, and God blessed it. God promised Abraham a great family. There was nothing Abraham could do to accomplish that either. His wife was barren. But God kept his promise. Then God promised him an eternal city, so Abraham was alright living in a tent, because he knew what was coming. It was a matter of trusting the promise which allowed Abraham to do things that would have caused most people to worry – leaving home, uncertainties about the family, living in tents. But Abraham believed and it was credited to him as righteousness.

That’s how God works. You see, not only does Jesus tell us not to worry because worrying is bad for you. He tells you not to worry because God has you covered. Jesus talked about how God provides for the lilies and the ravens. The Psalmist prayed, “**Lord you open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing**.” And he does. You’ve seen time and again God providing physically, but even greater than that, he has provided for us spiritually. He gives us the kingdom. He gives us heaven. So Jesus says, “**Seek first his kingdom, and all these things will be given to you as well.”** Seek what really matters – his kingdom, that relationship with God where God is reigning in your heart. That’s what fills the need. And yes, the other things we need will be given to us as well, but when we are focusing on the kingdom, our relationship with those other things gets in line. Do you see how this works?

Think of what really causes so much of our worry – it’s when we are looking to something else to fill the void in our lives that can only be filled by God. Do you know what I mean? That void in our lives needs to be filled and we convince ourselves that it has to be done by fun or food or shopping or drinking or drugs or power – and we worry that we won’t have enough of any of it. But when God is ruling in our hearts, when we are focusing on his kingdom, we realize what we really need.

We need the kingdom he was pleased to give us. We need the forgiveness of sins that he provided. When Jesus opened his hands to the nails on that cross and shed his blood and gave his life, he satisfied the desire of every living thing. He gave us what we really need. He won for us eternal freedom from the guilt and shame that makes our hearts feel empty. He won for us a place at the eternal feast so we can deal with missing a meal here and there now. He won for us eternal mansions, so who cares if we tent for a while here. That’s what Jesus was talking about in the last verse of our text.

“**Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also**.” Depending on what is important to us, that’s what we’ll worry about. If our treasure is the stuff that wears out and is affected by the stock market crash or can be stolen, then we would worry. But if God’s kingdom is what is important, we’ve got nothing to worry about because it is already guaranteed. Jesus’ resurrection proves that. So keep coming back here and being reminded of your true treasure. Seek his kingdom and all these things will be given to you as well.

Don’t worry. God has you covered.

In Christ, Amen.