

Sixth Sunday after Epiphany, February 16, 2020
 “Don’t Worry” (Matthew 6:24-34)

In the Disney classic, *The Lion King*, Timon, the meerkat, and Pumbaa, the wart hog, teach the young lion cub, Simba, their philosophy in life. It goes like this:

Hakuna Matata!
What a wonderful phrase
Hakuna Matata!
Ain’t no passing craze
It means no worries for the rest of your days
It our problem-free philosophy
Hakuna Matata!

Light-hearted fun that it is, it’s not exactly the same sentiment that Jesus expresses in our gospel from the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus does tell us not to worry. But Jesus’ words are more than a common cliché designed to put a spring in our step and a smile on our face. Jesus’ words about worry are deeply rooted in an understanding of God, whose good and gracious will is always to care for his people.

As we consider our Savior’s words on worry, I think we can agree that worry is a problem for each and every one of us. *Hakuna Matata* is just not part of our vocabulary. We do worry about tomorrow.

Now most of us don’t worry about what we will eat or drink or wear – as did many of the people in Jesus’ day – but we worry just the same. We worry about finances. What if I have an unexpected expense? What if my retirement savings don’t last?

We worry about our grades in school, our looks, our popularity.

We worry about our health. What will the test results show? Will I live to see my grandchildren? What if I become disabled or lose my memory? Who will take care of me?

We worry about our children. Will they be safe...successful...financially stable? Will they get into the right school, get the right job, marry the right person? Will they keep the faith, go to church and treasure the values with which they’ve been raised, or will they go their own way?

We worry about what people think of us. Do they like me? Do they hate me? Will anyone remember me when I’m gone?

And we might even worry about our standing with God. Will God hold my sins against me? Will I have to answer for those deep, dark things I have done?

We could go on and on about our worries. The truth is that we are future-oriented people and we tend to worry about tomorrow. That’s just the way it is. Now, we may not call it worrying. We might label it as planning or anticipating, or even the Wayne Gretzky syndrome: a *good* hockey player plays where the puck is... but a *great* hockey player plays where the puck is *going* to be.

But there are two problems in living our lives with such a future focus. The first is that we tend to worry about problems for tomorrow that never occur. Think of all the energy wasted worrying about things that never come to fruition. I imagine a large percentage of things we worry about never happen. I'd bet it's as high as 95 -97 percent. That's because we tend to paint the worst-case scenario.

For example, we have a pain in our stomach and immediately begin worrying that it is cancer. Our spouse is late coming home from work, and we immediately begin worrying that she was in an accident and is being transported to the hospital. We never consider that it's just a stomach ache or that she is stuck in heavy traffic. These may be silly examples, but you get my point. We tend to worry about things that never happen. And all this worry is not healthy. It gives us headaches, ulcers, high blood pressure, and causes heart attacks. No wonder Jesus tells us not to worry.

The second thing this future-oriented worry does is rob us of the present. If I spend my time worrying about what may or may not happen tomorrow, I can't fully enjoy the blessings God has given me today. And today is a day I'll never get back again. So why waste it with worry?

The question at the heart of this matter is *Do I trust God? Do I trust God to provide for my daily needs?* Jesus says we can and we should. And he uses two simple illustrations from nature to show us God's provision and care.

Look at the birds of the air, Jesus says. Perhaps he points to one flying overhead. *They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father takes care of them. Are you not more valuable than they?*

Consider the lilies of the field, Jesus says. The Greek word for *lilies* actually means *wild flowers*, and the word for *consider* means *to closely examine*. Jesus draws our attention to a simple flower, one that isn't planted or watered, but one that grows wild in the field according to God's design. You can almost imagine Jesus picking one of the flowers growing on the mountain, examining its beauty as he twists it in his fingers. *You know, King Solomon – who was blessed by God with great riches – never wore clothes as beautiful as these. So why do you worry about what you will wear? Doesn't the Living God clothe the flowers of the field? Will he not also care for you and make sure all your needs are met?*

Jesus uses these very simple, yet amazing, things of nature – a wildflower and a sparrow – to teach us a lesson. And the lesson is that we have no need to worry. He tells us that if God is concerned for the flower that grows wild in the field, providing the proper amounts of rain and sunshine, and if God is concerned for the sparrow, providing for a creature that can't grow its own food, then God certainly cares for us, his children, who are much more valuable in God's eyes.

Jesus wants us to grow past those worries that rob us of a full and abundant life by trusting that God will take care of us. He even tells us: *Don't worry because your heavenly Father – who knows you intimately – knows the things you need. And this same heavenly Father – who takes care of the birds and the lilies – will also take care of you.*

The good news we take away from this text today is that God provides – and does so abundantly. He gives us daily bread so abundant that we lose track, especially in our day and time. The fact is that contemporary Americans have far less cause to worry than most people in the world ever had. And yet we find ways to do it.

More good news is that God provides for us even though we don't deserve it. It's true, the rain falls even on the wicked. What we deserve are death and punishment. But what we get are gourmet meals, big HD TVs, SUVs and iphones, vacation homes, and gadgets and gizmos galore. Not to mention family and friends, a good name, and everything else we have.

But more than this, God provides first and foremost our salvation through Jesus Christ. Because of Jesus, our Savior, we have no need to fear the future or worry about the day of judgment. Even though God the Father demands payment for sin, God is also the One to provide it. He sends his Son to shed his blood in order to make everything right and new. God does all these things for us even without our asking.

The secret for not worrying then, Jesus tells us, is to put God – who provides all things – first in our lives. *Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Strive FIRST for God to rule your life, and then all these things shall be given to you.* This, you see, is the verse that unlocks the text for us. Do not strive first for the material essentials of life. Rather, strive first to walk in the ways of Christ. Strive first to live a life that is ruled by God and the values of God. Then all these material necessities – the things we need – will be sufficiently provided by our loving, heavenly Father.

When we put God first and trust in his provision, we can be certain that what we need to live tomorrow will be given tomorrow – not today. But it will be given. My task for today is not to have what I need to meet tomorrow's burdens. My task is to live with the blessings given for today, and believe and trust that there will be new blessings tomorrow. For that is what God promises.

So Jesus' call to not worry is more than *Khuna Matata*, more than a call to put on a happy face. He is calling us to repent of our lack of faith and put our lives – and our worries – in God's hands. And our trust will be well-placed. For if birds and lilies have no reason to worry, neither do we. God will always provide.