

## Sermon for Sunday, July 8, 2018 based on Luke 12:22-32

He said to his disciples, ‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. ‘Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

### Introduction

Jesus tells us not to worry.

And really its stronger than just telling us.

He’s commanding us not to worry.

When you hear this command, do you hear it as good news or impossible news?

Raise your hand if you hear “Do not worry” as good news.

Raise your hand if you hear it as impossible.

It would be great news if it were true that we had no cause to ever worry: if loved ones never got sick, if governments functioned well, if employment was always meaningful and steady, if we could always completely trust the people around us.

Imagine if Jesus had said, “Do not worry, believe in me and nothing bad will ever happen to you or those you love ever again.”

But Jesus didn’t say that, instead our passage for today says something a little different.

He says, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

### Why do we worry?

Jesus tells us to look at the natural world: the plants and the animals.

We don’t hold lilies of the field and ravens responsible for fixing what is wrong with the world.

We worry because we do hold ourselves responsible for solving problems.

And sometimes it can feel like a terrible weight on our shoulders when we think about all the people and work for which we are responsible.

Sometimes that weight feels impossible to carry.

The admonition to not worry implies something, most importantly, that it is not all up to you.

Our faith in God is not about an intellectual assent to certain doctrine.

Faith is fundamentally about trust: trust in something bigger than you.

So while the responsibilities don’t necessarily go away, in not worrying about them, we find ways to share the load.

As people of faith we bring what concerns us to God in prayer.

God knows what we need and God wants to meet our needs.

In fact, it is God’s pleasure to give us the goodness of his kingdom.

God isn’t waiting for us to prove ourselves worthy.

Just as we are, God is working on our behalf to bring us good things, to address the many things we worry about.

When we realize that, prayer changes.

In the Christian tradition there are two kinds of prayer: apophatic and kataphatic prayer.

They are both important.

## Apophatic Prayer

Apophatic prayer is prayer with words and images.

Our worship is filled with apophatic prayer: language that draws us to the reality of who God is, language that describes the nature of this kingdom of God toward which we are striving, language where we give voice to what we need.

I have found that sometimes it is incredibly helpful to write down what it is I think I need, to get clarity.

I invite you to do that right now.

With your bulletin you received a little piece of scratch paper inside an envelope.

While we take some time for apophatic prayer, on paper see if you can find the words to express what it is you need right now.

You are the only one who will see this, so take the time to write something honest.

It might be about needing to find the right life partner.

It might have nothing to do with you but something a loved one needs.

It might be something you see in the world that is needed.

Take the time now to put into words what you need.

## God Envelope

So how do you not worry about what you need?

You trust that it is your heavenly Father's good pleasure to give you what you need.

As a sign of that trust, I have a habit of putting what I've written into an envelope in my desk that I've labeled my God Envelope.

Beth made one for each of you today included in your bulletin.

For me the physical act of putting my worry into my God envelope helps me to remember to turn my concern over to God.

That often doesn't mean I don't then do anything.

But what needs to be done can be done without the energy of worry behind it.

Take a moment now and slip your prayer into your God envelope.

## Kataphatic Prayer

This leads us to the next kind of prayer: Kataphatic prayer.

This is often the prayer I turn to next after I've placed my prayer into my God envelope.

This is the prayer that has no words.

Notice what Jesus calls us, he says, "Have no fear, little flock"

In kataphatic prayer we allow ourselves to simply be—to be like a raven or a lily, one of God's creatures.

That is often the gift of pets, they teach us how to simply be.

When I take my dog on a walk, he is all about noticing everything: every movement that might possibly be a bunny, every smell, every sound.

And when I walk with him, it is a kind of walking kataphatic prayer.

He teaches me to simply be aware of all that I am feeling and sensing, to be in my body and not just in my mind.

Sometimes the way out of our worrying happens as we care for ourselves as we would a dog we just adopted.

Just as we'd make sure the dog got good food, exercise, affection, and play—we can often prioritize those same things for ourselves--to be the animals, the little flock, that we are.

And it is often in simply being in these bodies that we become aware of how God is answering our prayers or how God is prompting or opening us to the next right direction.

## Conclusion

The kingdom comes, not from our striving, or doing, but as God's gift.

In prayer we express what we need and we notice, we pay attention to the ways God is active in the world and in our lives.

Hear this good news, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."