

## Part I Why We Worry

Look to the birds of air! Look to the flowers in the field! If God cares for them, how much more will God care for you! Let us pray:

**In today's teaching, Jesus is getting to the root of so much what gets in the way of our happiness, and even our success, beginning with anxiety or worry. Why do we worry so much?**

I once heard a quote I like—"Worry is interest paid on troubles not yet due." It's a slight modification of a quote by Rev. William Ralph Inge. Interest or attention, energy, paid to troubles you don't have.

There are so many things we obsess about and worry about. We worry about our appearance, are we thin enough are we too thin-do we need to put on muscle, are we too tall or too short, too young or too old, are our clothes OK? We obsess about our food and our job and our car. Do we have the right job? Is this the right restaurant, the best wine, the best movie?

The internet has made it worse, I think, by constantly comparing everything. You **can't go to a restaurant unless its yelp score is above a 4. You shouldn't buy a wine unless it has a certain score.** This movie has a rotten tomato score of 89, but it got two thumbs up? Should we see it?

Everything is judged, everything is evaluated. It all adds to the anxiety, to the stress.

Are we doing our best, are we living the best we can, are we achieving what we should? Anxiety is a symptom of how little we trust God. God **isn't taking care** of us, so we must do all the worrying or we might end up naked, or starved or dead. So we worry as if worry will bring food to the table, make us thin (or muscular—depending), makes us healthier or somehow happier.

But all that anxiety is counterproductive—it so often leads to the very thing we fear and worry about. And it is so unnecessary. Jesus points to the flowers in the field—if God gives them such beauty, and they are here today and gone **tomorrow, won't he give you even more? And** I can imagine just then a bird flies by, and he points to it, and look at the birds of the air—**they don't gather into a barn, and yet God cares for them. God will care for you too.**

And we know, only too well, that this anxiety and fear does not stop with individuals—entire communities, even entire nations, our nation, can become so consumed with anxiety and we no longer function. This is what Brian McLaren wrong in *We Make the Road by Walking*, published in 2014—see if this sounds **familiar: "anxiety-driven systems produce a peckn order as anxious people compete and use each other in their pursuit of more stuff to stave off their anxiety. Soon participants in such a system feel they can't trust anybody, because everyone's out for himself or herself, driven by fear.**

Eventually, anxiety-driven people find a vulnerable person or group to vent their anxiety upon. The result? Bullying scapegoating, oppression, injustice.” (McLaren, 141). Read now, 3 years after publishing those words feel prophetic. McLaren goes on to say it doesn't stop there but eventually to threats and wars.

And Jesus' listeners probably thought that described the Romans, but in truth it described them too—with their desire for a political overthrow, and even us today.

Instead, Jesus calls us to trust on God, to seek God's kingdom. Don't rely on money. Don't let the anxiety that says you must have more, more to protect yourself against the future, more to stave off impending doom, more money, more riches, more security. If you are serving the master that is greed and money, driven by feelings of fear and anxiety, that will rule your world and your future. How dark it is when greed and money rule our future.

Part of today's passage that can at first glance be hard to understand, seems out of place and even almost meaningless. Jesus is talking about money and storing up treasures in heaven not on earth and he moves on to you can only serve one master, you can serve God or money, not both. But in between those passages is this:

**<sup>22</sup>“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; <sup>23</sup> but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!**

That seems so out of place but that's because it is an idiomatic phrase in Aramaic—Jesus' language—and it doesn't translate. In Aramaic there is a saying that a generous person has bright eyes, or light in the eyes, but a stingy or greedy person has dark eyes. With that understanding it makes perfect sense and fits here beautifully. Don't store up treasures on earth, don't hoard money here on earth, but instead invest in God's kingdom.

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You cannot serve both God and money.

Instead, seek the kingdom of God. Instead, trust in God.

When we focus on our own anxiety, on our own needs, then we look on our neighbor with suspicion. When you neighbor needs something and you worry that you may not get more money tomorrow or you may not have enough, you cannot afford to share.

But if you trust in the abundance of God's creation, if you learn from the bird and the flowers to live by faith in God's abundance, then we help each other, we share, we co-operate and we are all better off. Then we desire what God desires—for us all to be safe, to be prosperous, to be productive and to be happy. And when we want that we work for the common good. We work together, and everyone is better off.

When we realize that our true treasure, our true worth is how God sees us. Our true value is in God's love, then we put anxiety aside and seek the kingdom of God.

(Music)

## Why We Judge—part 2

After the problem of anxiety—and perhaps growing out of it—is the problem of judging others. When we worry about someone judging us, or not measuring up, then we are more likely to judge others—because if they are not up to our standards, that means we are necessarily ahead—right?

Judgment quickly becomes contagious—the more someone judges the more likely others are to judge, so they too can come out ahead. And when you are constantly subject to judgment, and to potentially failing, then you are constantly anxious, and you judge yourself against others, thereby judging them in turn.

This all dates back to Genesis and the two trees. One the tree of life, nourishes us so we see good in everything and everyone. The other, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil allows us to know the difference, to judge everything and everyone around us as good or bad. It sets up a dualistic system in which people and things are good OR bad, good OR evil, us OR them, which quickly devolves into us VERSUS them where THEY are always evil or wrong and we are always right.

And others do the same thing to us, trapping all of us in a vicious cycle of judgment and alienation which leads to hostility and separation.

And none of us are free. And none of us are truly alive as God calls us to be. And just as Jesus offered insight in how to get past anxiety—seek the kingdom of God—he has an antidote to being judgmental—look to yourself first.

Here again Jesus turns to eyes, the windows of the soul. Before you try to **remove the speck from your neighbor's eye, remove the log from your own.**

Be introspective. Look at yourself and see where your flaws are and deal with them. Only then will you be in a position to help someone else with their faults.

After all, who best understands how hard it is to improve something? Someone who's been through it before. **The person who best understands how hard it is to lose weight is someone who's tried to lose weight. Someone who best understands how hard it is to raise a child is someone who's raised a child.** And even then we need to remember that no one has tried to deal with that problem, that particular grief, that particular child or that particular struggle, other than that particular person.

When we focus on ourselves and the struggle that it is to be all WE can be, and all the ways WE fall short, it helps us be more understanding and patient with others who also have struggles, although struggles of our own. It is the person who has never tried to overcome their faults, or for that matter even admitted that they have faults, who has the least sympathy for someone else's faults.

That doesn't mean that we shouldn't be discerning, cast not pearls before swine, after all, but rather to be fully alive is to be connected to others, to recognize them as fellow members of the family of God, rather than the other to be judged. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Rather than an anxiety-ridden, judgment driven system, we are called to be part of the family of God, part of God's kingdom. Loved beyond measure and without end.

Because fundamental, at the root of all of our problems really, is that we fail to understand how deeply, how completely, God loves us.

Many of us are blessed with parents that love us, and others are blessed to be parents who love their children. The vast majority of us want only good things for our children. Our children want, and we seek to provide, good food. When our children ask for bread, we don't give them stone, and when they ask for an egg, we don't give them a snake. And if we, as imperfect as we are, know to give good things to our children, how much more does God, the perfect parent, seek to give good things to us.

And yet, we don't believe it. We waiver and we worry because fundamentally we do not understand just how much God loves us. Each of us.

But we are fundamentally, deeply, wholly, loved. When you feel that love, when you know that God loves you completely, just as you are, you cannot help but respond. So the next time you are stressed out or anxious or feeling judgmental, **Brian McLaren suggests you try telling yourself: "My own anxiety is more dangerous to me than whatever I am anxious about. My own habit of condemning is more dangerous to me than what I condemn in others. My misery is unnecessary because I am truly, truly loved."**

Imagine how your life could be different if you did not have to judge anyone else. Imagine how your life would be brighter if you did not have to compete or measure up or worry or be on guard all the time. Imagine the life and the **energy that would be yours if you simply lived in the presence of God's love**, sharing that love with others as best you can, and knowing that they likewise share that love with you. That, my friends, is the kingdom of God and it is at hand.

From Jesus' wisdom, true peace and true life will flow as we live into the very kingdom of God.