

The Reverend Marjo Anderson

Narrative Lectionary 4.50 – Stewardship 01/03
Matthew 6:19-34

19 August 2018
Salem, Bridgeport

“Let Go of Worry”

Today we begin a 3 week series on Stewardship.
Now when you think about Stewardship, what word comes to mind?
Yes – Money!

But to me there’s a much more important stewardship lesson in these words of Jesus –
the lesson has much more to do with time, and with the way we use the energy of our minds.

As human beings – at least in our culture – we think of time as being divided into 3 parts: past, present and future. Right? The laws of physics, however, tell us that there is no such thing as time – or as Einstein put it:
“the distinction between past, present and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion”.ⁱ
Since that concept is probably way too vast to wrap our brains around, let’s bring it down a notch,
and talk about what the Bible teaches –
that the kingdom of God isn’t just someplace else in some distant “future”
but that it exists for us in the here and now, whenever we live under God’s rule of love.
And when you think about it, the here and now is all we have.

Eckhart Tolle in his book, The Power of Now, explains it far better than I can:
“Have you ever experienced, done, thought, or felt anything outside the Now?
Do you think you ever will?
Is it possible for anything to happen or be outside the Now?
The answer is obvious, is it not?
Nothing ever happened in the past; it happened in the Now.
Nothing will ever happen in the future; it will happen in the Now.
What we think of as the past is a memory trace, stored in the mind, of a former Now....
The future is an imagined Now, a projection of the mind.
When the future comes it comes as the Now.”ⁱⁱ

Today we’re talking about Worry, next week the subject is Grief, & our third week’s theme is Fear.
Worry is about the Future, Grief is about the past, and Fear is about the present.

You might think worry and fear are synonymous, but they are not.
Real fear is about immediate and present danger –
someone pulls a gun on you, your house is on fire,
or you are under the emotional attack from someone verbally berating you.
Psychological fear, on the other hand, “comes in many forms:
unease, worry, anxiety, nervousness, tension, dread, phobia, and so on.
This kind of psychological fear is always of something that *might* happen,
not of something that is happening now.
You are in the here and now, while your mind is in the future.
This creates an anxiety gap.....
You can always cope with the present moment,
but you cannot cope with something that is only a mind projection –
you cannot cope with the future.”ⁱⁱⁱ

And anytime your mind is stuck worrying about something that *might* happen,
you are not free to enjoy the gifts that God is offering you in the Now.
That’s why Jesus tells us today, “Do not worry”^{iv}.
It’s not in the form of a suggestion, but rather a command –
as important as any of his other commands.
Jesus says, “Do it”. And we want to. But we can’t. Our minds are stuck in worry mode.
So how do we get unstuck?

A number of years ago, my doctor called after a routine mammogram to say she thought I had a lump. Immediately my mind went into full on worry – uh...panic – mode. But then I remembered a book I had recently read called Minding the Body, Mending the Mind. In it author Joan Borysenko had said that the secret to getting your mind out of worry mode was to focus down to the present moment. Do what you can do Now. And then let the rest go. It was just what Jesus had said about not worrying about tomorrow. And so I realized the only thing I could do at that moment was to make an appointment for the ultrasound I needed. I could do nothing between making the appointment and going to it, except to put my trust in God. I did. And the burden of worry was lifted from my shoulders.

Jesus lived in the Now.

He didn't grieve over his past; he didn't worry about his future.

He had a single focus: to do what God was calling him to do Now.

And that's what he's urging us to do in today's text: Don't let your mind worry about the future. Stay in the Now.

And realize that what we do in the Now matters.

If we do what God calls us to do in the Now,

we're much more likely to feel good about the memories that create our "past";

and if we do what God calls us to do in the Now,

we're much more likely to get to the "future" of our cherished dreams

rather than the "future" of our worried nightmares.

So what do we do about worries? Let's practice.

1. Write down one worry you have right now.

(e.g., "I said something that hurt my friend and I'm afraid she'll never forgive me.")

2. Realize that the worry you just wrote down is only one possible outcome

and think of a different possible outcome – a treasure that your heart desires.^v

(e.g., "My friend has not only forgiven me, but our relationship is even stronger because we got thru this tough time.")

3. Now write down something you can do today to get you closer to that better outcome.

(e.g., "I'll apologize again and commit myself to being a better friend in the future.")

4. Write down what is out of your control, what you are not able to do.

(e.g., "There's nothing I can do to make her forgive me.")

5. And then place everything else – all that remains – in God's hands.

(e.g., "Dear God, You know what I'm worried about. I've done all I can do for the moment.

I put all the rest in your hands, trusting in your power and love.")

Jack Canfield, co-author of the Chicken Soup of the Soul series, writes,

"Think of a car driving through the night.

The headlights only go a hundred to two hundred feet forward,

and you can make it all the way from California to New York driving through the dark,

because all you have to see is the next two hundred feet.

And that's how life tends to unfold before us.

If we just trust that the next two hundred feet will unfold after that,

and the next two hundred feet will unfold after that, your life will keep unfolding.

And it will eventually get you to the destination of whatever it is you truly want, because you want it."^{vi}

To me this is just another way of saying what Jesus said,

Just worry about today today, and tomorrow tomorrow, and the day after that the day after that.

That's how God has designed the universe – to unfold before us.

Love God and love your neighbor as yourself and then follow your heart and you will find your treasure.^{vii} **Amen**

ⁱ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/quora/2016/12/28/einstein-believed-in-a-theory-of-spacetime-that-can-help-people-cope-with-loss/#3118bbdc55d2>

ⁱⁱ The Power of Now, Eckhart Tolle, © 1999, Kindle edition, p. 50.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid., p. 43.

^{iv} Matthew 6:15.

^v Matthew 6:21.

^{vi} The Secret, by Rhonda Byrne, © 2006, Kindle edition, p 57.

^{vii} Matthew 6:21.