

# Sermon Text for May 5, 2024

By Guest Minister Rev. Doug Friant

## Giving it UP

### ***Deuteronomy 8:2-10***

<sup>2</sup> Remember the long way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments.

<sup>3</sup> He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

<sup>4</sup> The clothes on your back did not wear out and your feet did not swell these forty years.

<sup>5</sup> Know then in your heart that as a parent disciplines a child so the LORD your God disciplines you.

<sup>6</sup> Therefore keep the commandments of the LORD your God, by walking in his ways and by fearing him.

<sup>7</sup> For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, <sup>8</sup> a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey,

<sup>9</sup> a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper. <sup>10</sup> You shall eat your fill and bless the LORD your God for the good land that he has given you.

(Deu 8:2-10 NRS)

### ***Matthew 6:25-34***

<sup>25</sup> "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"

<sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? <sup>27</sup> And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? <sup>28</sup> And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin,

<sup>29</sup> yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you-- you of little faith? <sup>31</sup> Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?'

<sup>32</sup> For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

<sup>33</sup> But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

<sup>34</sup> "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today. (Mat 6:25-34 NRS)

All around us- there are voices that tell us what we can get. What we need to get. We won't be OK or already with out it...we will be better- so much better- with it.

Last week we were warned- to be careful- be careful which voices we listen to. See to it- that no one robs us of the good faith we've got...see to it that no one - or carries off our ideas or holds us for ransom.

It is not just that the voices around us are right or wrong- it is at times- that we they are not wholly true- not in the right perspective. Not giving us the full story. Not giving us a full perspective...

A few years ago I was watching the weather channel before a winter snow. It was winter time in central Pennsylvania and it was going to snow but the weather channel made it seem that our very lives were in danger from 4-6 inches. In between giving us the regular weather forecast- they did stories about terrible storms and weather disasters. They repeated the story so often I felt it was national emergency instead of the usual winter weather.  
Worry

Worry, want, need,

These attitudes have become such a regular part of our world and our lives. They are chains that hold us down and often drown us. TV advertisers and news shows work to enforce these bad habits.

All around us there are voices- piling attitudes on to us- trying to convince us that we are in need or would be better protected- better off- if we had.

But we are set free in Christ- and these things cannot bind us. So ...we turn this morning- to the hope we have in Christ- to give it up...giving up worry..

Joke

Husband and wife are travelling- they get about an hr away from home- and she is getting more and more agitated- finally he says- OK – what's wrong. Oh, She says. We are going to have to turn around. I think I left the iron on. I'm afraid I'm going to burn down the house. Oh, he said, that's Ok (as he began to turn the car around). You won't burn down the house. I think I left the faucet on- and I've probably flooded the house.

We- we all worry- we all worry- and we all worry about the same kinds of things: money, health, the people we love, acceptance, job. Etc. Part of our unique ability as humans is to project into the future. To plan and prepare- but sometimes- maybe all too often- planning turns to worry.

And yet we know that worry is a waste of time and that Jesus said- DO NOT WORRY. Jesus says to us- do not worry- and we want to say to him- but Lord you don't understand- we have to take care of our family- and the world is so complicated now- and there is global competition- and kids- just never grow up and we live so long—who will take care of me- when I'm 99.

But still- Jesus says to us- DO NOT WORRY.

Our reading from Matthew is part of the great section called the sermon on the mount. The sermon on the mount contains some of the most powerful ideas: The Beatitudes, the Lord's prayer, turning the other cheek, you are the salt of the earth, the light of the world, anger, forgiveness

There are some who would say- that this sermon on the mount is just an ideal kingdom ethics- for Jesus's words here are certainly challenging - anyone who is angry with a brother or sister is liable for judgment- like a murder- anyone who looks at woman with lust – has committed adultery.

The whole message focuses us on the idea that we are to seek first the Kingdom of God- above the treasures and attitudes of this world- above the small needs, fears, worries and doubts that drive- seek First the kingdom of God.

It is in that context that we get the words for today- Do Not Worry

He says

So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

<sup>32</sup> For the pagans (the pagans- the unbelievers) run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

<sup>33</sup> But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Food clothing- these don't sound excessive- yet- it is the pagans- who run after these things....I don't know about you- but I have to admit- there are times- when I felt like I have been running after those things. When my kids were little, and the house needed repairs- and there was no extra money...still Jesus says

Do not worry.

So this morning – let's stop and think a little about – worry.

Well- first off- we need to be clear- there are different kinds of worry- or maybe I should say- we worry about things for different kinds of reasons. All worry is not the same.

So let's sort this out.

At one point in my ministry- I was the power of attorney and pseudo family for an elderly congregation member. She had grown up in central PA coal country in the depression- when life was hard- and not everyone survived...

She was cautious- she worried. Even after she had a little money saved up- she worried that there would be a day when she would run out of money- after all there had been a day like that. She lived through hard times before- and she might again...She dried out and reused paper towels. She saved tin cans and used them for things around the house. She let the house fall down around her- rather than waste money on it. To an outsider – she worried too much- but from her perspective- she had good reason to worry. She was old and alone. She had no great skills or resources.

There are people like that- who have good reason to worry- whose history tells them – better safe than sorry. Hope for the best- BUT DEFINITELY PLAN FOR THE WORST.

Giving up worry is not giving up planning or responsibility.

Jesus is not telling us to be reckless and careless with our money. We are not a better Christian- if we spend and give without ever thinking about the future.

Some people are cautious- because there is a lot at stake. We hope that our surgeon worries a little about whether he got all the cancer out of us and didn't

leave any clips in us, we hope that the pilot landing the plane- worries a little about proper procedure and crosswinds.

Being responsible –is not the same thing as foolish worry.

Obviously when you are a surgeon or pilot- there are many lives at stake- but sometimes people's lives are so precarious that they must worry about even small things. A single mother working a series of part time jobs- can't afford to miss work for a few days. She worries about her health- she gets a flu shot-and does her best to stay healthy...because if she gets behind- she will never get caught up.

That kind of planning –and worry seems appropriate. But then there are other kinds of worry.

There is the person who worries about small things. A few years ago- a caught a group of you tube and Facebook posts- on the difference between First World Problems and developing World Problems- you know.... You have to drink Pepsi because the restaurant doesn't have COKE--- first world. You have to drink water out of ditch on the road- because there is no other water- real problem.

In our world- we are told that all kinds of things are SOOOO IMPORTANT- not whether we eat- but exactly what we eat- not whether we have clothes- but the label on our clothing and the style of our clothes- and the color and and and.

And DO not worry. Giving up worry IS letting go of little things

There is the OVERLY RESPONSIBLE PERSON. There is a fine line between responsible and overly responsible. Between the person who does what they need to do- and the person- who does what other people need to do.

Some of us- fall into this kind of worry. We over- function. We worry not only about what we need to do- but we worry about what others won't do- and we worry about what others will expect us to do- and we worry about what others will need – OR MIGHT NEED- us to do. Before long- we have planned out and prepared for everything- without counting on anyone. before long- we have fallen into a briar patch of worry. We can't sleep because we worry, we make lists and lists of list, we plan out every possible option and plan- we have two or three sets of items for every contingency.

The “I’d better take care of everything” worry. The overly responsible worry. Giving up worry IS giving up over-responsibility.

There are other kinds of worry- sometimes we worry about a difficult conversation or worry about a project or assignment- and the worry is so great- that we don’t take any action- we just worry. Oh I need to finish that report- but we don’t Oh I need to call that friend- but we won’t – Oh I need to ---- but....we worry

Worry becomes a HINDERANCE. Giving up worry is giving up being stuck in our heads without action.

Our reading from Deuteronomy is a classic story about worry and God’s care over us. It is a reference to the story of the Israelites eating Manna in the wilderness. The story is that as the Hebrews travelled across the wilderness on their journey from slavery to the promised land. God shows them manna. They can gather it up but only enough for the day- and only what you need. When they take too much their portion is leveled out. When they try to hoard- their portion goes bad. They are given their daily bread- each day. But just enough.

The apostle Paul says- do not worry about anything- but with prayer and supplications let your requests be known to God.

Worry is a spiritual problem- because we refuse to do the difficult work of discerning God’s involvement in our lives- we say to God- I don’t trust what part you will do- and whether you really have my best interests at heart- and whether you really will care for me....so I’ll do your job.

Let’s give up that kind of worry.

But how? It is often easier said- than done.

A few years ago- there was a book called- Habit Stacking- actually- now there is a whole collection of books that fall under that idea. The book introduced some great hints at making changes in ourselves. One was- that it is easier to add a habit than take one away. When we focus on giving something up- we often focus on it more- rather than less- and that’s not always good.

We might have a goal to lose weight- but that isn't really a thing we can do- we can think the pounds off...instead- we can weigh ourselves every day and pay attention to our weight. The other key idea in the book- was just take small steps but keep taking steps. So write down some small steps you can take in the right direction and keep adding them. If we are trying to lose weight, focus on taking small steps to eat better, exercise more, pay attention.

In our quest to let go of worry...

If we worry about letting go of worry- we can't really let go. Instead- there are ways that we can build our trust in God.

Trusting God...we preachers say such things all the time- and our words can be profoundly wise- but I think often- what we say- is profoundly stupid. Stupid because we say it so casually- as if – now that we have told people to trust God we will all do it more. Like some skinny person- telling someone- just don't eat so much. Like a 20 year old athlete saying- you should try running.

Trusting God- more- like all change – isn't easy. If we are going to let go of some of our control of our lives- and trust that God will take care of us- it requires some DISCOMFORT. Emotional discomfort to have a hard conversation, physical discomfort to accept we will be OK- even if things don't go our way. Maybe trusting God more- means asking for help- when we would rather not. Maybe trusting God means spending less and enjoying life more...maybe trusting God means sharing our manna with someone else.

Jesus doesn't promise that we will not have trouble. Sometimes the kingdom of God- brings trouble. Trusting God brings some discomfort- It is the discomfort of staying focus on what is happening today- not focused on what cannot be controlled about tomorrow.

Jesus says- So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.

The second key idea in trusting God more- is discernment. For most of us- it is not that we think God is untrustworthy- it is that our perception of God's will is a little fuzzy. Many people – talk about trusting God- like hope or wishing. Someone is stuck in the hospital- well we just have to trust God now. A woman plays the

lottery- saying I'm trusting God. A man does 110% of what he can do- and then says- he will trust God. These attitudes do not reflect trust

Jesus says- seek first the kingdom of God

"So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today. (Mat 6:34 NRS)

Today is trouble enough for today. We do what we can- and let go of what we cannot. Give it up

And we pray for the wisdom to know the difference.

Letting go of useless worry – is a spiritual exercise- it is learning to trust God. It runs the fine line between active involvement and responsibility for our lives and over or under involvement in our lives.

Strive first for the Kingdom of God and God's righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well