

Matthew 6:25-33 New Revised Standard
Version (NRSV)

“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? 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? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?

And why do you worry about clothing?

Consider the lilies of the field, 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, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?

Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and God’s righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

November 25, 2018

Matthew 6:25-33

Look, Consider, Strive

Thank you all so much for the welcome I've received this week – it is good to be together! And I am also just want to name the loss to our community in the death of Al Stevens - who was beloved in this congregation and community.

Will you pray with me? Holy God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Alright, since we are going to talk about worries today, we could start out with the obvious soft ball -- the holidays and all the very real stresses, anxieties and worries that come with the approach of Christmas. Instead of going easy, we're going to jump in the deep

end together. We're going to name the elephant in the room, the major transition that we're all in together that, let's be honest, as exciting and awesome and full of opportunity as it is, we might also have some worries about.

Any guesses?

Yep. You've got it. The new pastor! Yes, it is exciting, but we'd all be fooling ourselves if we deny having anxiety or worry as we step into this time of change together.

These are not all-inclusive but here are some potential worries: First and foremost -- how in the world do you say her name? Will she care about me and my family? Will her values line up with mine? She seems awfully young – does she really know what she's doing? Will she like our church? What if she doesn't? Will we like her? What if we don't?

Does she know our finances aren't the strongest they've been? Or that we had some members leave the church earlier in the year? What's she going to do about those things? Will she stay for a long time? Will we want her to?

It's Advent and Christmas – I hope she gets them right. For her sake and ours! She knows we sing Silent Night in German on Christmas Eve, right? She better not change too much too fast. On the other hand, there are some things that I'd like to see changed and I hope it doesn't take too long. Whew! And I'm sure that's only a sampling of the worries.

I want you to take a moment and write two things down on the index card in your bulletin -- first, write down a worry from your personal or professional life. Second, write down a worry that you have about our church life and the transition of having a new pastor.

In our scripture reading this morning, Jesus tells those gathered around him: "Therefore, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body and what you will wear."

I don't know about you, but being told not to worry when I am feeling worried already usually does not help me much. If anything, it makes things worse because now I feel worried and dismissed.

But wait. Jesus does not just tell us not to worry. Jesus has some ideas about what to do when we catch ourselves worrying: "Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet our God feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" When we find ourselves worrying, Jesus invites us to pause and to LOOK at the world around us. See, when we worry, our vision narrows -- worrying is like wearing blinders so

that we cannot see the big picture but only what is directly in front of us. Stop, Jesus invites. Take off those blinders and really look around. LOOK at the world. LOOK at nature. SEE where God is already at work.

Jesus goes on: “Consider the lilies of the field, 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.”

LOOK, Jesus says. Then CONSIDER what you see; CONSIDER what God is already doing in the world, in your life, in God’s church!

On the other side of that index card, I want you to write down one place in the world where you see God at work in creation or in your life or in the life of someone you love.

Reflecting on where we witness or experience God’s work in the world reminds us that we

are not alone. We do not have to handle this all by ourselves. It gives us perspective and invites us into a spirit of gratitude and trust instead of worry and fear.

Finally, Jesus invites us to STRIVE for God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness. Jesus does not want us to sit back and rest on our laurels. He is not inviting us to simply chillax and release all responsibility. Jesus wants us to strive for God’s kingdom: to cultivate peace, hope, joy, humility, kindness and love in our lives, in God’s church, and in the world. No simple task. And frankly, one that takes practice.

Advent is a good time for that practice. It is a good time to prepare our hearts and our lives for Emmanuel, God with us. It is a good time because, let’s be honest, it is a time when worry and anxiety come easy. Our Mason Jar Advent Calendars invite us into this practice. They invite us to take time each week to pray

and to set aside time each day to do something that cultivates love and grace, conversation and connection. They give us practice in the work of striving for God's beloved community.

Transitions are also a good time for this practice -- they come with worry and anxiety. Change can be difficult and scary as well as exciting and life-giving. As we step into our shared ministry, bringing both old and new, we will still worry, and we are as sure to have moments of disappointment as we are to have moments of celebration and success.

But we need not let worry drive us. When we find worries setting in, when we find them taking hold, let us remember Jesus' invitation to LOOK at the world around us for God's presence, to CONSIDER how God is already at work and, together, to STRIVE for God's beloved community here at First

Congregational Church, here in Loveland and here in our world. Let us continue to share our worries AND our hopes for our church so that we can face them together and with God.

Oh! And those index cards? You can take them home with you to use in your prayer time or you can put them in the offering plate, and I will include them in my prayers this Advent season.

Will you pray with me?

O God,
Sometimes we forget who and whose we are
And we allow our worry to get the better of us.
Remind us as we approach the holidays and as we step into this time of transition and new beginnings
That you will neither leave nor forsake us

Help us to pause and LOOK for your presence
in the world;

Lead us to CONSIDER the ways that you are
already at work

And empower us to STRIVE for your peace,
hope, justice and love

In the world

Today and every day. Amen