

Have a think about what keeps you awake at night. Now I don't mean the indigestion or the next door neighbour's barking dog. I mean what concerns float in your mind that you can't let go off? Or the nagging problem or health issue that just sits on you. If worry and anxiety are not part of your life, then count yourself lucky as you're in the minority. In the UK during the pandemic between 2020 and 2021 8.3 million people were being prescribed some form of antidepressant – that's about one in eight people.

But imagine right now if you were a person living in Ukraine, or what about along the Syria – Turkey border – now that truly is worry. It's one thing to worry about what you will have for dinner; it's another to wonder if you're going to have dinner at all. But even we who live in peace and plenty can always find something to worry about. If our needs are secure, we start worrying about our wants.

People in Jesus' day were just as anxious as we are, if not more so. The men and women standing on that mountainside listening to Jesus' sermon had to deal with providing for their families, pleasing their employers, raising their children, and paying their taxes. They also had a foreign army occupying their country, and nobody had health insurance.

Jesus knew all about what they were up against. And yet he told them, flatly, "do not be anxious." That is a tall order for those that were listening to him. And as he said it then, he means it to apply to us also. And here's why he believes it important.

The first is that there is more to life than things. I was in Poland over the weekend, and in a coffee shop a sign on the wall said this – The most important things in life are not things. Now that's easy to say when you have so many things. It's not easy if you live somewhere where the basics don't exist. The second reason why it's important is that worrying never helps. It will never add a single second to one's life. In fact we all probably know that the more worry there is the more risk it can place on one's health.

And so the third reason not to be anxious is that our Father is a good provider. Jesus used birds and flowers to illustrate how God feeds and clothes his own. If we are going to be free of the worry about things, we have to believe that God really does love us, and really will take care of us. But I'm not sure how many people, including Christians, actually believe this. Because if we truly did then the level of worry in our communities would be much less, and we would be living much more in faith rather than in fear.

So what shall we do with all that energy, all that attention we've been investing in for tomorrow's troubles and worries? Well Jesus says in our passage – "Seek first for the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be given to you as well." [Mt 6:33]

But what does seeking after his Kingdom mean? The Greek word here for seek is '[zēteite](#)' which I think is better described as desire. "Desiring for God's kingdom" means that we are to be at work on behalf of God's kingdom. If God's kingdom is in good shape, our worries and things of this life will be just fine. We are to speak God's name into the silence and worry, and bring his light into the darkness and

carry out his work among his creation. This, of course, requires first of all that he rules in our own lives.

Desiring for God's righteousness means to live out Christ's life in us. Remember that we have no righteousness of our own. So we have to live in daily dependence on Jesus. As he told his disciples at the last supper, we have to "abide in him" in order to bear fruit. Abiding in Christ means thinking about him, studying the Bible so that the Jesus we follow is the real one, and not a figment of our own imaginations. It also means spending quality time with him, loving him with prayer and praise. In addition, it means evaluating our actions in the light of his example. And, finally, it means doing what he asks us to do. Our minds, our hearts, and our wills must all be involved.

Nothing is more important, or more real, or more certain than God. So the question for all of us is whether we really believe that there is nothing more important. It's only then that all things will fall into place. If we turn our attention away from our needs, our burdens, our worries, and place our focus on God's glory, his faithfulness, his righteousness, his goodness, then our needs will be met - often from a source we would never have expected. If we let go of all the stuff we cling to, that neither lasts nor satisfies, God will provide what we really need - and all we really need.

But we have to remind ourselves every day, because whenever we let a worry take hold it's like a parasite burrowing under our skin. Worries grow and multiply, chewing holes in our relationship with God and weakening the foundations of our faith. We can't avoid things happening in our lives that will try to rock our trust in God. Worries may cast an occasional shadow, but we don't have to live with them. And the only sure cure for the worry virus is to trust God.

So what am I saying? That Christians shouldn't be prudent, shouldn't prepare for the future? Far from it! It was Paul who said, "Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil." [Ephesians 5:15-17] Jesus never said "don't plan for the future." What he said was, "don't worry about it." There's a difference.

I can't think of a more appropriate way to finish, than the words of scripture which an older parishioner reminds me of regularly. They are words from Proverbs 3:5&6 and this is my prayer for you in your days of worry 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.' Let me read this from the Message – 'Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure out everything on your own. Listen for God's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he's the one who will keep you on track'.

In other words, the answer to all your worries is to strive throughout your life to focus totally on the Lord. Seek his face every minute of the day, in every consideration and every trial, and so then everything will fall into place. Amen.