

## "Don't Worry"

Matthew 6:24-34

Pentecost 2A/Ordinary 8A

MAY 25 2008

Yesterday life in Byron was dominated by the memorial service at the high school for the Reis family. About a thousand people came together to grieve and to celebrate the lives of their four dear friends whose lives were lost in a terrible fire. The testimonies, music and prayers that were offered were a powerful witness to God's love and healing.

The day took a turn later in the afternoon when after the service Robin and I joined a group from the church on a tour of the Bergen Swamp. Our tour guide was Chip Blair, a member of the church and the President of the Bergen Swamp Society. I've never been into the swamp before. I was very impressed with Chip's knowledge of the trees and flowers and particular micro-habitats that each of them flourish in. Along the way we saw all kinds of little flowers, red, purple, yellow and white. So far into the swamp that Byron seemed a thousand miles away, Chip showed us a very rare wildflower, a tiny white lady slipper orchid, one of the great treasures in God's creation. By the time we were that far along on the swamp tour, enjoying a rare view of those delicate little wildflowers, all the cares, troubles and worries of the world outside seemed to disappear.

Have you got troubles? Listen to what Jesus says about that: "*Don't be worried!*" That's what he says, "*Don't be worried.*" Don't be worried about food and drink, don't be worried about clothing, don't be worried about the basic things you need for living. "*Look at the birds, and how little they worry about anything*". "*Look at the wildflowers*", and how little they worry about anything". Instead of worrying, Jesus says, try trusting God, and God will provide the things you need. So forget all of that worrying - trusting is so much better than worrying. Overwhelmed with worries? Well look at the wildflowers and birds and you will learn about another way of living. You can see why people listened to Jesus, they wanted to learn everything they could about worry-free living. Jesus told them all about it, and he's telling you all about it, too.

Have you ever experienced worry-free living? I remember one time in my life when I truly did not worry about anything. It lasted only a few moments. It happened while I was driving to Syracuse one day. As I headed east from Rochester the radio station I was listening to faded out, so I tuned around and found a small college station playing a catchy song that I had never heard before.

It began with a whistle ... maybe you recognize the tune by Bobby McFerrin, a Jamaican musician who wrote the song "*Don't Worry, Be Happy*".

Here is a little song I wrote  
You might want to sing it note for note  
Don't worry be happy  
In every life we have some trouble  
When you worry you make it double  
Don't worry, be happy.....

Each time he sang "don't worry, be happy" I really felt it. By the end of the song I was smiling, and hoping that I'd be able to hear the song again. I forgot all about war, about overdue bills, about any problem I ever had. I wasn't worried about anything!

Are there any things you are worried about this morning? Lots and lots of things. Worried about the terrible tragedy that happened in our town this week. A family suddenly lost in the flames, and three other families homeless. It's hard to top that. But we can put many more things on the list. Worries about loved ones in the Iraq War. Worries about fuel and food prices. Worries about job security. Worries about the mortgage. Worries about our friends, about our children, about our parents. Worries about earthquakes and cyclones in Asia. Worries about our worries.

You know, if you came to me with just one of these worries, what would you think if my advice to you was "Don't Worry"?

Of course, if I tell you not to worry, I better be doing some things that would help to reduce your worry!

So I know that Jesus was not just telling people not to worry, he was also backing up that idea with all of things we need to do to reduce your worries. He offered food. He offered healing. He offered peace. He offered love. So in a world of worries, as his followers we strive to do the same.

Here's a nice story I read this week that I think demonstrates how one church developed a plan to reduce worry. The story is told by Rick Ufford-Chase, a former moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. Some of our youth met Rick at Camp Whitman one time. But here's the story he told about visiting Tek Tung Presbyterian Church, a very small congregation on the island of Taiwan.

*"The pastor of Tek Tung church had been there ever since graduating from seminary eighteen years before. In the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan, pastors are assigned to their first parish, and the pastor, who was among the most energetic and creative pastors Rick ever met, described his initial disappointment at being assigned to Tek Tung. When he arrived, he discovered that the small congregation, numbering only about twenty-five people, had been losing members for some time. There was a feeling of isolation and even fearfulness as the little group of Christians confronted what they saw as a hostile culture, more than 97% of the surrounding population was non-Christian, and not particularly welcoming to this small church in their community. The most obvious sign of the members' fearfulness was that there was a six-foot high brick wall surrounding the church property and turning it into a compound that could not be seen from the outside.*

*The pastor said he knew no creative ministry could happen there so long as the congregation was acting from a place of fear. After being there a year or so, he pushed the members to tear down the wall that surrounded the property. Though such a bold suggestion would probably have led to asking the pastor to leave in many churches that Rick has visited, in this case, perhaps because it was obvious that the church would die without bold action, the congregants agreed.*

*Little by little they tore down the wall on the street side of their property, eventually replacing it with a low, decorative wall to mark their boundaries. Then they followed their pastor's lead to try to make their worship life as transparent as possible to others in their community: they removed the heavy wooden doors on the front of the sanctuary and replaced them with glass doors so passersby could see inside.*

There's more to the story Rick told, about other ways that this small congregation in Taiwan began to get past the walls to reach out more and more, but you get the point. It's a church that learned to leave worry and fear far behind.

The truth is that I still have plenty of worries. I'm not yet at that place where I can trust Jesus to remove all of them. I'm not sure I'm ready to live worry-free, but here are two verses from scripture that help me get through tough weeks like the one we've just had:

*"Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful,  
For I have taken refuge in you;  
In the shadow of your wings will I take refuge  
Until this time of trouble has gone by."  
[Psalm 57]*

*"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble.  
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be moved,  
and though the mountains be toppled into the depths of the sea,  
though its waters rage and foam,  
and though the mountains tremble at its tumult,  
the Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our stronghold".  
[Psalm 46]*

