

Matthew 6: 25-35

<sup>25</sup> “Therefore, I say to you, don’t worry about your life, what you’ll eat or what you’ll drink, or about your body, what you’ll wear. Isn’t life more than food and the body more than clothes? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds in the sky. They don’t sow seed or harvest grain or gather crops into barns. Yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren’t you worth much more than they are? <sup>27</sup> Who among you by worrying can add a single moment to your life? <sup>28</sup> And why do you worry about clothes? Notice how the lilies in the field grow. They don’t wear themselves out with work, and they don’t spin cloth. <sup>29</sup> But I say to you that even Solomon in all of his splendor wasn’t dressed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> If God dresses grass in the field so beautifully, even though it’s alive today and tomorrow it’s thrown into the furnace, won’t God do much more for you, you people of weak faith? <sup>31</sup> Therefore, don’t worry and say, ‘What are we going to eat?’ or ‘What are we going to drink?’ or ‘What are we going to wear?’ <sup>32</sup> Gentiles long for all these things. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them. <sup>33</sup> Instead, desire first and foremost God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. <sup>34</sup> Therefore, stop worrying about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Hello, my name is Glo.... and I’m a recovering worrier. I won’t.... but I could list at least ten concerns in my life, that are mostly on the back burner. I know, because I listed them when thinking about this scripture. We all know that our lives can change in a moment, and bring our concerns to the forefront.... and if so, my anxiety would be off and running.

We live in scary, anxious times.... far too many struggle. The plight of the homeless, the difficulties in many countries where people are not safe in their own homes. The planet is hot and hurting. Natural disasters are unavoidable. Children get stressed about school and grades. In the social sciences, we call this noticing the risk factors. When someone has too many risks at play in their lives, it’s hard to imagine anything good coming of this. There is an

overwhelming sense of powerlessness. What can we possibly do to rise above all this that is weighing us down?

But there is another way. We can look to the promise.... to the possibilities. We can focus on the gifts and the blessings that each of us has to help us rise above adversity.

Jesus was one of us. He had experienced first hand, and he'd heard many stories of woe.... stories of difficulties. And he'd lived this himself. His family was on the run in his early years, refugees in Egypt seeking safety from a vicious king. The Holy Lands seemed far from holy in those times, like today. There were tribal interests, prejudices, religious conflicts. He could see all the people around him who were challenged by life.... the woman at the well.... those who were ill or hurting.... those who were trying to make very difficult decisions. He saw those who were hungry, those who were alone and needed help. I imagine he even had some of his own worries sometimes.... how am I going to get these people to understand? When will the disciples get what they are being asked to do? When will they really trust God.... trust me.

Because isn't that what this scripture is really about. Jesus is asking us to trust. And it's not easy. When a loved one is hurting or struggling or even dying, sometimes it's extremely difficult to let go and trust.

We can focus on all those things we're concerned about... and we often do with our incessant worries. But we realize that worrying won't make our concerns go away. *Or* we can choose to notice the blessings.

In my work with families, resiliency studies have shown us over and over again, that when we focus on the problems.... we feed the problem.. We feed the anxiety and helplessness. We can see children and adults as damaged and hopelessly beaten down by all the experiences in their life that are working

against them - poverty, abuse, educational challenges, family struggles, and hope seems distant. OR we can focus on their gifts, all those experiences and talents and gifts that offer hope and the promise of new possibilities.

In her book My Grandfather's Blessings, Rachel Naomi Remen tells us about Jesse.

We strengthen life any time that we listen generously or encourage someone to find meaning, or wonder about possibility, or dream or hope or escape from self-judgment and inner criticism or know that we matter. Anytime we share someone's joy, we bless the life in them.

Jesse does this as naturally as she breathes. Her own life has not been easy; nonetheless she is a celebrator, a deeply happy person. Although she has had two episodes of colon cancer and many professional disappointments, her joy in life is tangible.... She is always one of the first to celebrate someone's birthday, to remember anniversaries, to congratulate people on their successes, whether she knows them well or not. So Jesse is one of the first people to call when something good happens to you or to someone you love. She is there to listen to the whole story with delight. Often when you finish talking to her you feel even better about what has happened, luckier than before.

I asked Jesse about her joy in life. Her own life has been hard. Didn't she feel envious of others who had things she did not? She smiled and shook her head. "Then what is your secret?" She replied that joy was not something personal. When I looked baffled, she explained she has found that if you are genuinely happy for them, people are very generous with their joy and share it with you open-heartedly, "When someone shares that something good has happened, I am there to celebrate it with them. Their good luck makes me feel lucky. I rejoice with them about it as fully

as if it had happened to me.. It makes me happy.... and then it IS happening to me.”

Jesse was diagnosed with cancer that had spread beyond her bowel. The surgeon removed as much as he possibly could. But folks were told to keep her comfortable for as long as they could. That was fifteen years ago.... When you strengthen the life around you, perhaps you strengthen the life within you.

Jesse’s experience reminds us that joy, happiness, love.... these are at least partly a choice.

Janet Hunt has said,

Even my small worries get in the way of my living in the moment God has prepared for me. They take away from my fully experiencing and appreciating what is right in front of me.

Jesus knew this, of course. No doubt this is part of why he so beautifully urges his disciples and all of us to pick up our heads and look around. It is why he points us to the vastness of God's gifts and pushes us to remember that God [is present in it all]....And so [this scripture is] ours this Thanksgiving \_\_\_ urging us to let go of the worry \_\_\_ and to entrust whatever it is that would rob our lives of peace and joy \_\_\_ urging us to finally give it all back to God who gives us all of that for which we give thanks in the first place.

I began the morning by saying I’m a recovering worrier. Hey, I’m a mom,... and I’m a daughter.... a sister.... a friend. So I’ll probably always have some worries. I’m a work in progress. But I also have tools that I use to keep my worrying at bay.... or to deal with the troubling issues when they do arise to the surface.... and they will.

One thing many of us do in the midst of our stressful times is to focus on the doing. What CAN we do? I know one of the ways I deal with my anxieties and worries is take action.

Mr Rogers has said, “When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me - look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.”

Yes, we can look to the helpers for support.... There are so many examples of kindness, compassion and generosity. There are many good listeners. And we can also *become* the helpers. Being of service helps us to focus on positive action and to feel a sense of usefulness.

I have other tools to deal with anxiety... I read and journal. I love taking walks and getting out in the beauty around me. I enjoy photography. And at some of most anxious times, one of my most effective tools is gratitude.... I acknowledge my blessings. I remember all the things I'm grateful for and I regain some strength and courage to deal with the hard stuff.

What are some of the many blessings that lift you up?

Jesus said - Isn't life more than food or clothing? Or what you're having for Thanksgiving dinner? You are worthy.... you are enough and love and blessed just as you are. When has worrying ever helped.... or given you additional moments in your life? Notice God's beauty around you. All is holy.

Life is tough.... sometimes way more than other times. And Jesus is offering us another choice. In addition to gratitude and noticing all the blessings, we also have prayer, a direct line to reach out to God and Trust.... trust that God is there with you, whatever happens. Trust that you can find the helpers when needed. As we notice our many blessings, we are choosing hope and peace and possibility. Thanks be!!