

"GETTING RID OF OUR ANXIETIES"

TEXT: "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day" Matthew 6: 34.

INTRODUCTION One of the things that all of us have in common with each other is this: we all worry. Some of us worry about the state of the world, and the possibility of another war. Some of us worry about the state of the financial world and the possibility of another crash. Some of us worry about the state of our own health, and the possibility of another sickness. All of us have this tendency to worry. To be sure, some of us worry more than others. There are people who are what you might call chronic worriers, always fussing and fretting. Even when things are going well they're anticipating danger. But most of us only worry occasionally. My point is this however that all of us worry, more or less, and in different ways.

Now this tendency to worry is not peculiar to just the people of today. To be sure, this has often been referred to as the age of anxiety, and I think all of you know why. There is in the very life of our times, not necessarily in the life of any one individual, but in the life of our times, a deeper disturbance than normal. But even though this is true, this is not the first time that people have worried; this is not the first time that people have been anxious. We talk about anxiety so much I suppose it would be well for us to define it, and so here's a brief, clear dictionary definition of it:

"Anxiety is an uneasiness of mind caused by the apprehension of danger."

In this sense people have always been anxious and they have always worried. For instance Herod worried about his throne. Hamlet worried about the ghost of his father. And plain ordinary people down through the centuries of time have worried about their children and their daily existence. And so given danger, which seems to be one of the unmovable facts of life, and given man's incredible ability to anticipate it, men will worry and men will be anxious.

And yet, in spite of this, Jesus said "Don't worry". And mind you he said it three times in the 6th chapter of Matthew, three times in this sermon on the mount. Reading from the J. B. Phillips translation, he said: "Don't worry about living - wondering what you are going to eat or drink, or what you are going to wear." And then again a second time, "So don't worry and don't keep saying, 'What shall we eat, what shall we drink or what shall we wear!'" And then finally this section ends with these words: "Don't worry at all then about tomorrow. Tomorrow can take care of itself!" We can be sure of this that Jesus felt very strongly about this tendency on the part of human beings to worry. It represents one of the few times that he ventured to use the word "Don't" "Don't worry at all about tomorrow"

NOW TO BEGIN WITH.. Now to begin with, I think that Jesus knew people well enough to know that he wasn't going to get them to stop worrying by simply saying "Don't worry". It goes a little deeper than this. You can't get a baby to stop crying by saying "Don't cry". The baby goes right on

crying. Well that's often how it is with people and anxiety. We know it's wrong. We know it's a waste of energy. We know that it doesn't accomplish anything. We know from our own experience that we can't stop worrying by simply saying to ourselves, "Now I musn't worry, and I won't worry, and I'm not going to worry". It's one of those things that's deeply rooted below the level of consciousness, below the level of thought control.

And then I think this too, that Jesus knowing what people were knew that they would never be completely free from worry. Jesus understood people. He knew what was in man - his temptations and his tendencies. He knew something about worry and anxiety - its depth, power, and reality. Perhaps there were times when he himself had to wrestle with worry and fear. And yet knowing both of these things: first that you can't get people to stop worrying by simply telling them to stop, and second that people being what they were they would never be completely free from worry - knowing both of these things, he went ahead and said "Don't worry about your life". It sounds a little impractical.

But the important thing is that he didn't leave the matter resting there. He went on quickly and said some other things. He was willing to pave the way with some negative suggestions, but he followed them up with some strong positive affirmations. In this case he said something like this: "Look at the birds, and look at the flowers. The birds never sow nor reap nor store away in barns and yet they are fed. And the flowers do not work or weave and yet they flourish with a brilliance and a beauty that even earthly kings do not have." He's not saying that a man is like a bird or a flower, or that he should be like a bird or a flower. Heaven forbid. We know that birds and flowers do not have the capacity to apprehend danger. And Jesus knew that. Nor was he saying that a man should not work for a living. The birds work. You may have watched them. Why they work harder than the average human being when they're making a nest. Jesus was not implying that we should sit back and do nothing. He wasn't implying that God is going to feed you with a silver spoon.

If Jesus was not saying this, then what was he saying? I think he was trying to say something like this: that the birds and the flowers are free from care and yet wonderfully cared for. He was saying that if God cares that much about birds and flowers, which after all are not too important in the total scheme of things, how much more does he care for you, who are made like him, with a certain share of his freedom and creative capacity. If he cares that much about the flowers that bloom for a day and are then forgotten, how much more he must care for you who can share in his love and his power.

CLIMAX OF THIS SECTION.....

And so it might be summed up in this fashion: God cares, God can, and God will, if you will. Earlier in this sermon I suggested that Jesus knew what was in man - that is, he knew something of his temptations and tendencies to worry. But on the other hand, he knew what was in God - that is, he knew what the eternal resources were. He knew something of the power that was available to man for overcoming sickness, sin, and worry. He knew that in spite of the weaknesses of human personality, we were still in a position to be moved mysteriously from within by a power not ourselves, a power far greater than ourselves. He knew that God cares, and that God can, and that God will, if you will. In other words,

if we do our part, God will do his part. For instance, if we do our part in making a living, God will do his part to see to it that we have the things that are necessary. Now you may say, no it doesn't always seem to work that way. If that's the way that you feel, it may be that you're putting too much emphasis upon those things that are not really important, at least not important shall we say in the eyes of Jesus.

I think it always helps if you can have things translated for you into terms of concrete illustrations. And so for our purposes this morning, let's think about a parent and a child. You may not have a child growing up right now and perhaps you never had one, or perhaps he has grown up and is beyond the reach of your anxiety, but think of it if you will in these terms. You have a child. You want certain things for your child. You want this child to grow up having a good time. You want him to have some of those things you didn't have as a child because your parents weren't able to afford them. You want this child to have the proper friends. You want him to have a good education. You want him to go to college. If it's a girl, you want her to "come out" at the right time, and to have the right kind of boy friends. If it's a boy, you want him to get started in life with the right amount of financial security behind him. And it's possible and altogether natural, that you want this child to be like you as much as possible, and you want him to belong to you forever.

Wanting these things you begin to worry. You worry about your job for fear that you might lose it, or might become ill and have to give it up. You fear that you might not be able to make enough to give him a college education. And then you begin to worry about your child. He's a little different than you expected him to be. He's not getting into the clubs that you had hoped he'd get into. His interests are different from yours. He isn't fitting into the pattern that you had pictured for him in your own mind. You begin to worry about the girl he's going to marry. She may not bring him the things that you had craved for him in the way of prestige, security and happiness. You worry about his future. And above all you worry about his life, for if anything should happen to him, you would lose him and something would go out of your life, something that you may be clinging to with a desperate and possessive passion.

Now I realize that none of you fit into this particular illustration. That's not the important thing. The important thing is that you understand what I mean when I say that these things are not the real things. These things I suppose are good in themselves and in their proper place, but if you and that child went and stood before Jesus, do you think that he'd be concerned with these things. I doubt it. I think he'd be much more interested in the kind of person this child was growing up to be, whether he was free to be himself or not, whether he had the kind of spirit that could weather the storms of life, whether he was the kind of person who would contribute to the needs of his fellowman, and whether he was building the kind of character that would enable him to stand up in a world that is upside down.

JESUS PUT HIS FINGER ON IT..

I think Jesus put his finger on this very thing when he said: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you". Perhaps

it isn't what we would like to have heard him say. All of us would have preferred to have heard him say: "Seek ye first the great things of life and then there will be added to you all the things that you want." But he didn't say that. He put it this way: "If you seek the great things, you will have what you need"

I feel that I've only just begun to touch on this subject. But before I close, let me translate some more of these thoughts into concrete illustrations. In my short time in the ministry, I've discovered that people tend to worry more about their health than anything else. And the one thing that is likely to loom the largest in their worry about health is cancer. We all know why. And we all sympathize with those who have this particular anxiety. Sometimes I wonder if the medical profession in its attempt to cure cancer and to make people aware of the symptoms of cancer has not had too much publicity so that people are becoming obsessed with it. All of us I think know of people who are living in daily dread of this disease. And all of us I think are going to do our best in supporting the cancer drive which is being held this month. But our concern this morning is how can we get rid of this anxiety.

I suppose there's only one way and that is to change the center of our interest in life. Health is precious, let no one deny that. But I think life is more than health. There have been many people who have lived wonderful lives who have not had good health, lives that were creative beyond our imaginations. And then I would say this too, that there is something even more important than life. You may not think of it in these terms, but there may have been times in your own life when you've said something like this, "I'd rather die than have to do some things". And perhaps you've said something like this: "There are some things I would go through anything to be". In other words, there are some things that you care more about than you care about life itself.

And so you see that once you shift the center of your interest from health and existence, and all the comforts and conveniences associated with it, to something far greater, shall we say to Him from whom our health and existence is derived, once we shift our center of interest to him, then we begin to get rid of some of our anxieties. None of us look forward to sickness. None of us can take the serious sicknesses like cancer and heart trouble without some twinge, but all of us can say something like this: my interest in life is greater than in my own health or even my own existence, and I live to do, even though imperfectly, God's will and whatever he wants me to do I will do, and I know that I will have the strength to do it when the time comes.

Once you get rid of your anxieties, you have a better chance, though not a guarantee, of health. The people who are not looking for health are the ones who are likely to find it. And so the next time you worry about anything - your job, your health, your children, - say to yourself: GOD CARES, GOD CAN, GOD WILL, IF I WILL. For if you concern yourself with the great things of life, you'll have very little time left to worry about the little things, and in so doing, God will be helping you to get rid of your anxieties.

LET US PRAY: Thou hast given us minds, Our Father, whereby we may anticipate danger. Give to us the faith to live from day to day trusting in Thee, not caring about the little things, but only for the things that really count and are truly great and important. For in so doing, we shall then walk without fear and worry. Amen