

the Rev. Karen Millard
Squamish United Church

February 27, 2011

Scripture Readings:

Isaiah 49:8-16

Matthew 6:24-34

Don't Worry Be Happy

How many of you can hear Bobby McFerrin running through your head. "Here's a little song I wrote - you might want to sing it note for note ...Don't worry be happy ... Don't worry be happy."

Oh there are days when that song just lights up my life. I listened to it on you tube as I began to write this sermon and the comment right below was "How can you not like this?"

I can see myself writing that comment most days. But unfortunately this week Matthew 6 caused quite a surprising reaction within me. I spun between 'yah right and okay and guilt and failure and no, I can do this, yes I believe this....until the cycle started again.' Don't worry some days seems quite reasonable and possible and I love the reminder that God cares for us in the midst. But don't worry at others times actually seems impossible and maybe even a little irresponsible.

I'm not always a worrier. But most us us have things that burden us and so "Don't worry about your life" well it comes across as a bit trite.

Lose wrote "Most days, life feels like one worry strung after another like lights on a morbid Christmas tree. Worries at work (a colleague who's mad at me). Worries at home (a child struggling at school). Worries about...well, you name it (the economy, the *work* deadline I'm so far from reaching, the friend whose child was just diagnosed with cancer...). Do you see what I mean? Worries attend us like bees to honey.

And I don't think it's just me. I think we live in an incredibly anxious culture. The evening news certainly depends upon worries at home and abroad to attract viewers. Commercials are constantly inviting us to worry about one more thing – usually about ourselves!.... More and more houses seem to sport home security signs in their front lawns. And whenever I go to the airport I'm greeted outside by a...sign that reads, "See Suspicious Activity – Call 1-800...) and inside by an ominous voice informing me that, "The threat level, as determined by the Office for Homeland Security, is Orange." (I don't even know what "orange" is, but I'm betting it's not good.) And there it is: everywhere you turn, everywhere you look, there are visible reminders of just how much there is to worry about.

So how in the world, then, can Jesus possibly ask us – really, command us! – not to worry?”¹

And then what comes to mind is a reminder of a colleague I worked with a few years back who lives out of that motto. The problem was whenever he didn't follow through on his project, or was really late for a meeting, he would bounce in with a “Don't worry be happy - right?” You might imagine that got a little old.

I think he missed the point of the scripture - which he claimed he lived out of. And perhaps when we turn this into a Bobby Ferrin song we do too. If we go back to how this text began we might notice that the first statement is “we cannot serve two masters, both God and money....if we try we will end up loving one and hating the other.” It's not that Jesus is saying money itself is evil but it sure does make a poor master. “Actually, the word in Greek is *kurios*, often translated "lord." The lord is the one who demands and deserves your loyalty, allegiance, and worship.”

So if money is Lord then what we end up with is a culture and life of never enough. “Luther once observed.... Once we believe that money can satisfy our deepest needs, then we suddenly discover that we never have enough. Money, after all, is finite. And so once we decide money grants security, then we are ushered immediately into a world of counting, tracking, and stock piling. No wonder we worry - in a world of scarcity, there is simply never enough.”

A book that I found incredibly helpful on this subject was “The Soul of Money” by Lynne Twist. I think of this book every time I begin to worry about the ‘not enough’s of life.

Twist wrote “No matter who we are or what our circumstances, we swim in conversations about what there isn't enough of. I see it in myself. For me, and for many of us, our first waking thought of the day is “I didn't get enough sleep.” The next one is I don't have enough time.” Whether true or not, that thought of not enough occurs to us automatically before we even think to question or examine it. We spend most of the hours and the days of our lives hearing, explaining, complaining, or worrying about what we don't have enough of. We don't have enough time. We don't have enough rest. We don't have enough exercise. We don't have enough work. We don't have enough profits. We don't have enough power. We don't have enough wilderness. We don't have enough weekends. Of course we don't have enough money - ever. We're not thin enough, or fit enough, we're not smart enough, we're not rich enough - ever. Before we even sit up in bed, before our feet touch the floor, we're already inadequate, already behind, already losing, already lacking something. And by the time we go to bed at night, our minds race with a litany of what we didn't get, or didn't get done, that day. We go to sleep burdened by those thoughts and wake up to that reverie of lack....What begins as a simple expression of the hurried life, or even the challenged life, grows into the great justification for an unfulfilled life. It becomes the reason we can't have what we want or be who we want to be. It

¹ Lose, David workingpreacher.org Feb 27,2011

becomes the reason we can't accomplish the goals we set for ourselves, the reason our dreams can't come true, or the reason other people disappoint us, the reason we compromise our integrity, give up on ourselves or write off others.

Twist goes on to say "It is not even that we necessarily experience a lack of something, but that scarcity as a chronic sense of inadequacy about life becomes the very place from which we think and act and live in the world. It shapes our deepest sense of ourselves, and becomes the lens through which we experience life. Through that lens our expectations, our behavior, and their consequences become a self-fulfilling prophecy of inadequacy, lack and dissatisfaction."²

Jesus offers us an alternative way of being. He suggests we live out of the economy of love and abundance. The kingdom of God lives out of love that cannot be measured. When you live in love you and gratitude you will find yourself in the realm of abundance. "In the pursuit of more we overlook the fullness and completeness that are already within us waiting to be discovered. Our drive to enlarge our net worth turns us away from discovering and deepening our self-worth."³

When you live in the economy of abundance you live in a world of possibility and contentment - you live in the world Jesus calls the 'kingdom of God.' In that world not worrying might actually become an option.

Lose continues "I know, it's hard to believe in this world of abundance that Jesus proclaims, this world that invites us to trust God's faithfulness like a flower does spring or sail upon the currents of God's love like a bird does the air. This is why, in the end, Jesus dies ... because those in power were so invested in the world of scarcity that abundance was down right frightening, even threatening. Scarcity, after all, creates fear, and fear creates devotion to those who will protect you.... Abundance, on the other hand, produces freedom."⁴

God operates out of abundance in such a way that even in death, there is life. Even in darkness there is light. Even in the poor, the weary, the meek and mild are blessed. Don't get me wrong. I know it can be hard to operate out of abundance in this world of scarcity and never enough. But isn't that living differently exactly what we are called to? We are surrounded by images of worry, fear and scarcity what if we were to change our lens for the next week and capture visions of abundance, courage, trust, love, and enough.

Let's try again to be intentional about our Sunday morning learning. This week send me photos of abundance. Email me, or post on face-book, or bring me photographs of images of god's abundance. Take notice of places, visions, and events where you see God at work in the world.

² Twist, Lynn "The Soul of Money" pg. 44-45

³ IBID pg. 47

⁴ Lose, David

“Count your blessings” you might say. I would love to see images and pictures of places of courage, sites of abundance, moments of love, signs of trust. I don’t even want to give you examples...I want you to send God’s abundance my way and in the next weeks we will share it with one another. Maybe next week you could even bring things of abundance to decorate the sanctuary with. Photos or banners, or gifts you have been given. Let’s celebrate abundance next week.

I would like to conclude with a quote from the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore

I lived on the shady side of the road
and watched my neighbours’ gardens
across the way reveling in the sunshine.

I felt I was poor, and from door to door
I went with my hunger

The more they gave me from their careless
abundance the more I became aware
of my beggar’s bowl.

Till one morning I awoke from my sleep
at the sudden opening of my door,
and you came and asked for alms.
In despair I broke the lid of my chest open
and was startled into
finding my own wealth.⁵

As you go from here I invite you to abundance.
I invite you to be startled into finding your wealth in the world God has given.
May it be so.
Amen.

⁵ Twist, Lynn pg. 116