

## The Worry Machine

Genesis 15:1-6; Luke 12:32-40

### Slide: Do not be afraid

I wish I didn't worry so much. In fact, I may even worry that I worry too much. While on the outside, I know that I am non-anxious in my presence, and I do practices of prayer, mindfulness, and taking walks in nature, the fact is that I worry like many and most people do. The brain naturally pays attention when pressure mounts.

And, although my life is full of God's goodness beyond anything I deserve, expect, earn, and all that, the engines of my mind are still whirring away about the next thing that needs to get done, occasionally at night when I really should be asleep.

I make lists of things to do like "work on the acolyte schedule" or "prep your sermon for this Sunday", etcetera, etcetera, even though I know I will get to that anyway and at the normal time that I usually do. As if I

would forget all the things I need to do, those lists however help me to sort out what is important (or not), what to attend to, just in case I forget some of them.

Only a worrier knows the satisfaction of crossing things off a list, as if there is nothing as satisfying as dark lines through those words on a page, representing all those things that get done. The more I scratch off that list, the more my mind can relax and not think of rather a lot of things at once. Except, and this is important, the list never ends, so a person does need to learn to let worry go and to trust in ones abilities.

Some people would call these worry types, type "A" in a personality inventory. Type "A" people are the ones that get things done, but they probably also spend a lot of time worrying about getting it done. Now, don't you type "B's" think you're in the clear here, because you are not.

Type "B" types, the ones who are thought of as procrastinators; they ruminate in

their worry at the last minute likely because they are perfectionists. In the last minute of things, I have come to see them as ones who worry just as much, not only because of their own pressure on themselves, but also the pressure of type “A’s”, who need them to be done because it was due yesterday. There is nothing so worrisome for Type “B”s than hearing the deadlines whizzing past their ears from the vocal chords of Type “A”s.

Now that I have sufficiently placed us all into two groups, which is something I generally “worry” is problematic, let me just say this: The problem of worry in pretty systemic. And, serious anxiety disorders are nothing to take lightly. Worry is a very serious commodity right now. I say commodity, because plenty of people are using and selling fear as a weapon to frighten people, convince people others are enemies, and to downright declare that the world is ending or our way of life is threatened, especially in politics and the media. All of those tactics are lies,

but they do work. We are growing afraid.

But, Jesus does address our tendency to worry quite a bit. It’s even in today’s Gospel: “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” In fact, just in Luke’s Gospel alone, the words “Do not be afraid” are said about 69 times. It’s clear that is a resounding message for us to hear today. And, it was a resounding message from God to the people who followed Jesus in the first simmering of church.

We are not alone with anxiety. The followers of Jesus knew it quite well. They were worried living in Rome in a time of oppression. Many of them did not know where their next meals came from. There was political and territorial violence everywhere. They worried about their families, for the future of their religious practices being forbidden, for losing possessions, health, and vocation just like we all worry today.

Heck, they probably even worried about their budget just like every church is right now - "I don't know Jesus where the money to fund all your ideas are going to come from," Matthew might have said. That's just a wondering, of course. But, I assure you, the 69 times of saying it out loud by an angel, God, or Jesus was necessary in Luke's Gospel, because it's difficult to heed, feel, and embody. One would need to hear it so often for it to stick.

So, how do we make it stick? How do we heed our Lord's gentle call to "be not afraid"? In his inviting us to cease our worrying, Jesus asks us to divest ourselves of our fear, but also our control, the control we all long to grasp onto, some of us to our dying breath: Sell your possessions, Jesus says. That would help release your fear. After all, a lot of that STUFF we don't need. Give money to those who want and who suffer. Again, it removes our desire to control so that we can live with less fear. For, Jesus knows those things

cannot save us and really, they make us more afraid.

And then, in the second part of the reading, we hear what laying down our fear looks like: It looks like action. Faithful action is taking the risk to put down one's fear to prepare the house for the Master to come. That preparation is our service to God's reign here on earth and the world that will come when Christ returns. We are always in a place of preparing, always, staying alert instead of succumbing to our fear. Easier said than done, I know!

I wonder what succumbing to fear in the church looks like today. How are we as the people of God staying alert to prepare for the Master to come home? Here are some ways that I think we must enter into trust and service, so that we do not stay in fear:

- We stay in fear if we assume we think we know why people aren't coming to church right now. There are lots of reasons. Not all of them are ones you might

think. How are we afraid about that instead of trusting that God will work through this with us and call us in ways that will make us thrive?

- We stay in fear if we think doing things the way we always did them will have a good result. We often want to control how things are and especially desire them to be how they once were. Naturally, all of us have ideas as to what it should be. But, the world has changed. It no longer can be many of those things.
- We stay in fear if we don't take new risks of service, knowing they may be out of our comfort zone, be risky, or even show no results at first.
- We stay in fear if we worry the church will be gone in 20 years without trusting that God is working a new creation in new ways under the surface. It could be transformational. Wouldn't

you want to be a part of that?

All of these worries are normal. They are my fears, too. I worry about them. So do you. There is a sense and feeling of failure when we fear and worry. And, when we feel that way, we have a tendency to assume it's true when it's not. And, some worry is good because it does lead us into action and helps us to be prepared for the Master to come.

However, we should not be afraid when working on solutions to these worries together. And, we ought not to fear so much that we attempt to control things to the point of squelching very valuable service we could be doing. Faith communities discern together what those fears are and what their action should be towards changing them, for the future of family life together.

For it is God's good pleasure to give us the Kingdom.

*We cannot control the world as much as we wish to. We cannot manage the changing tide of the*

Christian church. We cannot control many and most things that come our way. But, we can be faithful in trusting God, and prayerfully seeing that trust through to action in waiting for the reign of God to come - by doing that, we will have a lot less fear and worry.

Let's light lamps together and get to work. We have some things to do to prepare for the arrival of the Master. In the meantime, remember *God has got this*. It's time to trust and listen and breathe into something possible with the gift of God's life transforming Spirit to guide us. Jesus says that the Kingdom is ours. And that...will always be true.

Amen.