

The Clerk of Session in my former church was also the postmaster. Prior to that he spent 20 years in the Navy, and while you can take the sailor from the sea, you cannot take the sea from the sailor. He served his country, and he served his church. Every Sunday morning (unless he was away) he was in church, and as I would begin the sermon, he would get comfortable, lean back his head and “rest his eyes.”

Have you ever done that? The clerk’s wife wasn’t terribly happy with him, especially when he “rested” deeply, but I took it as a good sign. To rest we have to relax. To relax we have to let go of our cares and concerns, and between running a post office, serving on town council, serving as clerk of session, and having an 80+ year old father, a brother with some challenges and a son with some challenges, he had cares and concerns.

So when I look out on a Sunday morning and see that someone has fallen asleep, I thank God, because the weight of worry has lifted from that person. Worship has allowed that person to heed Jesus’ command, “do not worry about your life,” at least for a little while.

Sleep hasn’t always come easy over the past year. I’ve lost sleep due to worry. I suspect I’m not the only one. It’s been a struggle, and like most struggles, I made some mistakes, and I learned from them. The past year hasn’t been easy for us. We face challenges in the year ahead. Together, we have the opportunity to experience the freedom Jesus offers when he says, “Do not worry about your life.” To that end, we’re going to “consider the lilies,” By taking it one day at a time, we’ll be free as a bird.

▷ CONSIDER THE LILLIES

Jesus’ often describes his disciples as “you of little faith.” Remember the story of when Jesus walked on the water? The disciples are terrified, but Peter says, “Lord, if it’s you, invite me to walk on the water.” Jesus says, “Come on down!” Peter gets out of the boat. He takes one step, and another, and another, and then he sees the storm, and down he goes, but Jesus does not let him drown. He takes him by the hand, and I would like to think that holding Jesus’ hand, Peter walks on the water again back to the boat. “You of little faith.”

I can relate to Peter. I try to heed Jesus’ command “do not worry.” I take one step, and another, and another, and then...down I go. “You of little faith.”

Jesus knows that we need a hand. Simply telling us, “Do not worry” isn’t enough. Jesus didn’t come to lay even more burdens on us; he came to set us free – as free as a bird. So he invites us to “consider the lilies of the field.” He gives us something to do rather than simply telling us, “don’t.”

This word “consider” moves us beyond a cursory glance. “Well, would you look at that! Lillies in a field.” “Consider” calls us to slow down, to focus our attention, to invest some time and thought into what we are seeing. “Consider” calls us to contemplation.

Jesus models this contemplative perspective for us: *Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you.*

Jesus considers a field and sees the extravagant care of God. Grass was fuel for the fire. It was here today and gone tomorrow, and yet, God cared for the grass and made the field grander than Solomon. Jesus considers a field and centers himself in the extravagance of God rather than in the extremity of his circumstances.

Contemplation keeps us centered in the love and mercy of God, in the extravagance of God’s grace. It offers us a different way of seeing our situation. One author wrote “It is reported that over 90% of what we worry about never happens. That means that our negative worries have about a 10% chance of being correct. If this is so, isn’t it possible that being positive is more realistic than being negative? ...If you think about it, the important issue is not which is more realistic, but, rather, “Why be miserable when you can be happy?”¹

Eugene Peterson, another great contemplative paraphrases Jesus this way: Pennside: “If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers—most of which are never even seen—don’t you think he’ll attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you? What I’m trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God’s giving.”

Pennside, hear the word of the Lord: “Relax. Do not worry.” “Consider the lilies of the field.”

B TAKE IT ONE DAY AT A TIME

Memorize this verse. *Matthew 6:34 (NRSV) “So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.”*² Memorize it so you can recite it to yourself when you need it. My Mom writes verses on little slips of paper and tapes them to the mirror so that as she’s getting ready for the day, she sees the verse, and it helps her be ready for the day.

¹ Susan Jeffers, *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*. New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1987. 72.

² *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

We all know the cliché, “Take it one day at a time.” As the Phillies get ready for the new season in Clearwater, I can imagine an interview: “Cliff Lee, as part of the Fab 4, the greatest rotation in human history, do you think you’ll break the record for most wins in a season?” And Cliff will reply, “I’m just taking it one day at a time, one game at a time, one pitch at a time.”

We all know this, but as gas prices rise, taxes rise, and budgets get cut, we worry about tomorrow. “Take it one day at a time” is easier said than done.

And what if we did take it one day at a time? Life insurance – I don’t need it. I’m taking it one day at a time. Budget – don’t need one. I’m taking it one day at a time.

If we take Jesus’ words literally, the day will come that has more trouble than we know what to do with. If we ignore them, each day will be filled with its own trouble, plus the guilt we feel about yesterday’s trouble, plus the anxiety about what tomorrow will bring. That too is more trouble than we know what to do with.

So what do we do with these words when we see them in our mirror or on a sticky note on our computer monitor? We take them to heart. We put yesterday in God’s hands and let it go. We remind ourselves that tomorrow is in God’s hands and we trust God with it. We do our part, but we remember that it is only our part. God also has a part to play, and in the grand scheme of things, which is after all God’s scheme of things, God plays the larger part. Therefore, we are free to *Matthew 6:33 (NRSV) strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*³ Entrusting ourselves to God’s gracious purpose sets us free as a bird.

Eugene Peterson paraphrases this: Pennside: “Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don’t worry about missing out. You’ll find all your everyday human concerns will be met. Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don’t get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.”

Pennside, hear the word of the Lord: “Relax. Do not worry.” “Consider the lilies of the field.” Take it one day at a time. Do your part today, and trust God with the other days. The future is in God’s hands. Entrust yourself to God’s purpose, yesterday, today, and tomorrow, and you will be free as a bird. Amen.

³ *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.