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Matthew 6:25-34
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Counting to Enough
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In Matthew chapter 6 we encounter a series of teachings from Jesus to his disciples. Jesus takes them through some basic dos and don'ts for their lives. He teaches about giving to the poor, about how to pray, about how to fast, about not storing up their treasures on earth, about not serving idols, and about not worrying. Do not worry about what you will eat or what you will drink or what you will wear. The birds don't worry about what they will eat. The flowers do not worry about what they will wear. The Good Lord feeds them and clothes them and your Father knows your needs and will care for you also. 'So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.'

Jesus is talking to a group of men who have left their worldly possessions behind, left their families, left their fishing nets, left their safety nets, left everything to follow Jesus. They have felt the call of discipleship and yet in accepting their call they did not leave their worries behind they just traded their old worries for new ones. You might think if your team leader is the Savior of the World then you would literally have nothing to worry about but such is not our nature. We worry. We like to worry. We are programmed to worry. Worry is one of the great American pastimes. We worry about big things like nuclear attacks and small things like if the person sitting next to us on our red-eye flight will snore or worse yet – want to talk. We worry about superficial things like our hair going gray and things beyond our control like our hair going gray. And all of this fret and anxiety and worry actually have very few positive outcomes. Dr. W. C. Alvarez, a stomach specialist at the Mayo Clinic, in talking about his work said that, "80 percent of the stomach disorders that come to us are not organic...most of our ills are caused by worry and fear."

Jesus says, "Do not worry." Then he talks about the birds of the air and the lilies of the field as examples for how to live this life. Now before you start to think up reasons why you are nothing like a bird and how a lily doesn't have a mortgage...let me tell you that scholars believe Jesus was being poetic here. The birds and the lilies are metaphors. The bird and the flower are symbols of things held in God's providential care - a reminder to us that God cares for us even more than these.

If you can imagine Jesus' twelve anxious friends sitting by his feet for their daily lesson to hear him wax poetic then you can understand how this might have been effective. Suddenly they aren't thinking about where they will procure their next meal or the journey they must take tomorrow. All of a sudden they are looking up to see the birds flying seemingly effortlessly above them or they are squinting their eyes to see the array of flowers on the hillside to discern the colors of their petals. Consider the lilies. Consider the birds. These considerations help us to refocus. Attune our eyes towards things of nature, and beauty, and simplicity.

Get our eyes to stop focusing on the chaotic and frantic pursuits of our daily lives. Jesus tries to lift our sights towards a calmer vision of God's bountiful care for the world. John Calvin comments on this passage, "The perverse burdensome carefulness for the things of this life is corrected in the children of God by an earnest thinking upon the providence of God." 'Perverse burdensome carefulness' is Calvin speak for 'worrying too much.'

Jesus gives instructions not to worry and then he offers this poetic reset and he concludes with more instructions not to worry. Jesus probably knows he can't just say 'Don't worry, be happy' and then move on. He needs to give us more than that – tell us why and show us how. The theological underpinning of this poetic lesson is God's abiding love for the disciples – God knows their needs and will provide for them. Jesus tells them to look, really look, at a world where God is the provider. In looking at the world with these lenses it overpowers the lenses of anxiety we typically wear. The disciples are being asked to replace their worry with faith and trust in God. Ye of little faith – Jesus labels those plagued by worry, 'consider the birds, consider the lilies'.

Last January we had a pretty awful house fire, as many of you know. One of the many side effects of the fire was that my once carefree four-year-old became very anxious and worried. She had a particular worry about running out of things; anything she was enjoying became a source of worry. Are we running out of these? Will we be able to buy more if we run out? Do you know where to buy these? Can we come to this place again? How long will be we able to stay here? Whether it was beads we were using to make jewelry or food we were eating, homes we were visiting, even clothes we were putting on, all became a new source of stress. My reassurances that we would always have enough were the Band-Aid on top of the bigger issue. After one particular meltdown when we ran out of Cheerios, we trekked off to Safeway and I told her she could buy as many boxes of Cheerios as she wanted. This was a high stakes game (although I intentionally grabbed a basket instead of a cart). One box of cheerios. Two boxes of cheerios. Three boxes of cheerios. She could see the basket filling up and she started to laugh. Four boxes of cheerios. Five boxes of cheerios. Six boxes of cheerios! "That's enough!" she cried. Thank goodness, we had reached the threshold and trekked home with enough cereal to last until she goes to college.

Knowing boxes of cereal were only going to help somewhat, I started changing up her evening prayers. Instead of our usual routine of me starting with 'God bless' and her filling in a litany of every person she could remember from the day. We started praying that we would always have enough. Dear God may we always have enough...parks to play in. May we always have the enough friends to love. May we always have enough energy to play. May we always have enough ice cream, and bubbles, and toys and whatever else she wanted to name. Finally we were turning this responsibility of providing over to its rightful owner – to God. This was a reset. For her and for me. God is the creator, redeemer, and sustainer. God is the great provider for the birds and the flowers and for his children. And sometimes we forget it, and then we get anxious, and we worry,

and we lose sleep. Jesus said we do not add a single hour to our days with our worry instead we destroy the precious days of our lives with our fret over tomorrow.

The Washington Post had an article on Friday titled *Thankful to be Alive*, about this Thanksgiving for thousands of California's who have been displaced by the recent fires. Amid the mounting worries listed in the article: "When will they be able to get back to work? Will they be able to pay the bills? How will they restart their lives? Where will they find a new home?" There was also a profound sense of growing gratitude. Liza Johnson, one of the evacuees said, "It's probably the best thanksgiving of my life. Being alive – and my family being alive – it makes you realize." Others listed a place to lay their heads, the kindness of strangers, the reminders of the things of real value, being with loved ones, all as blessings that might have previously gone unnoticed. For Christians, the ultimate blessings we count in times of worry or strain are God's love for us, God's presence in our lives, and God's provision for our basic needs.

The fact is that we all worry – and some of these worries are legitimate about health and finance and relationships and the world. But we need to make sure that our worries are not putting us in the wrong seat – as THE provider for our lives. For we know we have a much more dependable one on whom we draw our strength. *A footnote here: This is a sermon for a privileged group of people, whose worries are not typically around basic needs – Jesus is preaching to his disciples whose basic needs are being met. Earlier he addresses their response to the poor and he has different reactions and words of assurance and encouragement for those who are truly struggling day by day. The message 'do not worry' is for those of us who fill our minds with worries of a different level and whose worries become stumbling blocks for their faith.

Jesus' teachings are for those with the whole range of worries as he reminds us that in times of scarcity or in times of abundance, God is there. God was there as the creator of the world, God is there as the sustainer of all things, and God will be there to ultimately redeem the world from all of its brokenness and sorrow, wiping away all worries and tears. For this faith that we have in God, we give thanks. When we are thankful, we have less time to worry about what is lacking. 'Consider the lily' is a perfect recipe for the anxious. 'Consider the birds of the air' is a perfect remedy for the worried. For these considerations lead us towards wonder, towards gratitude, towards prayer, and ultimately towards God. Fret and worry have no positive direction of expression – they just cause us to spin.

Corrie Ten Boom in her book *Clippings from My Notebook* about her time during World War II in the Ravensbruck Concentration Camp writes, "Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow. It empties today of its strength." You can worry about tomorrow or you can try to be grateful for today. Jesus makes a strong recommendation against the former. Consider the birds of the air. Consider the lilies of the field. Consider God's love for you and try not to worry.

In keeping with the genre of Jesus' teaching, we come to the poet Wendell Berry as he captures the call to look at the world with new lenses in his poem, *The Peace of the Wild Things*:

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light.
For a time I rest in the grace of the world, and I am free.

Or as the Psalmist writes, 'He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside still waters. He restoreth my soul.'

Consider the birds. Consider the lilies. Trust and believe.

Amen.