

Do not worry... Baptism Sermon on Matthew 6:25ff

Sisters and brothers, Amanda and Sven, stories do not belong to those who write them, but to those who need them. This is a sentence from the beautiful movie “The Postman”, in which a poor Italian postman uses a love poem composed by the great Pablo Neruda to impress and charm the girl he loves. Neruda tells him off when he finds out and the postman defends himself with this lovely sentence which I have never been able to forget...

...stories belong to those who need them...

And all of us need stories – especially on a day like this, when we baptise a child and think about the future of all our children, of all of us in a way, a little more than we usually do -. We need stories to give our life a framework and to provide pictures for our future: pictures that invite us to walk the path of our life journey... and live our life in faith and hope.

Let me start by telling you a story:

In a small fishing village in Spain next to his old fishing boat a poor fisherman lies dozing in the midday sun.

An elegantly dressed tourist passes by, unpacks his expensive camera and takes a picture of the fisherman. Click. And click again.

The fisherman opens his eyes.

The tourist offers the fisherman a cigarette and makes conversation about the weather and the fishing conditions.

“You are going to make a good catch today,” he says to the fisherman who shakes his head. “...you mean you are not going out fishing today?” the visitor asks. The fisherman nods.

“I have already been,” he says.

“And – was the catch good?”

“Brilliant”, the fisherman says, and puts his hand on the other man’s arm.

“I’ve caught enough to keep us going for the next two days”, and there is a happy twinkle in his eyes.

The stranger doesn’t look happy at all.

He puts his camera to one side and sits down.

“Imagine,” he says to the fisherman, if you went out again today, and maybe again and again, imagine how many fish you could catch.

And if you did that every day... just imagine:

you’d make so much money, that in a year’s time you might be able to buy a bigger boat with an engine, you might even have more than one boat, a boathouse and storage for the fish, a little factory maybe, workers of your own, a helicopter to detect the shoals before you go out fishing; you could open a fish restaurant, sell the fish all over the world...

The stranger is totally taken by his ambitious vision of the fisherman’s future.

“And then”, he says, “and then imagine – in the end, you could sit here in the harbour, and enjoy the sun and the beautiful view out over the sea...”

“But that is what I am already doing”, the fisherman simply replies... “It was just the click of your camera that interrupted me.”

The tourist looks at him in astonishment, picks up his photo equipment and walks slowly off ... feeling deep inside that the fisherman had s.th. he would have loved to have too...

This story has a lot in common with the gospel text which the Methodist lectionary suggests for this Sunday.

It comes from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 6, and shows us what attitude towards life Jesus wanted for people.

Let us listen to this passage in the context of our own lives, our own hopes... our families, our children, our friends...

Do Not Worry

25 «Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

26 Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.....

27 And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?

28 And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin,

29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.

30 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

31 Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?'

32 For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

33 But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

34 «So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own.

Do not worry...

sounds like a piece of advice from another world?

We cannot live as our fisherman does. ...or as birds and flowers do. We have responsibilities. We have commitments. Especially when it comes to raising children and helping them to become faithful Christians who will one day make a difference in this world.

We cannot live as our fisherman does. ...and Jesus pretty well knew that, when he spoke those words from his famous sermon on the mount.

He challenges our worrying about our children, our old parents far away, about peace and justice, about the future of the earth, with a God who cares...

...a God who cares for birds and plants and human beings... We only have to trust him and let him do his part. ☺

Which isn't always easy, is it?

Remember the tourist in the fisherman's story.

He would have loved to do more, sacrifice the well deserved break, be active at any price, develop and extend, proceed from one success to the next, work and strive. Do it all

himself... the sooner the better... no rest, no fun, no free time until everything's been achieved...

It is enough, Jesus tells those who listened to him, to struggle with the problems of the present, the things that need to be done today – don't worry about the things that might come in future, the things you don't yet know about but can so easily imagine.

We cannot live without worries altogether, no human being can, and the older we get, the more we know; the more we are responsible for, the more we feel the weight that lies on our shoulders... sure... and there often isn't much we can do or change about it.

What we can do, is to try to keep the number of our worries as small as possible, protect ourselves against their overwhelming force, and not let them poison our life, our days and nights, our sleep, our peace of mind.

Jesus is very straightforward when he tells the folk of his day:

you cannot add a single day to the span of your life by worrying.

You cannot extend your own or anybody else's life for the tiniest moment by worrying and fretting, but you can cast an unspeakable shadow over your own and your loved ones lives by only seeing the dark side of life, the fears and the burdens.

And some of those he spoke to really did live with the dark side of life already.

It was the poor, the powerless and outcasts of his day that Jesus encouraged to worry as little as possible, enjoy what can be enjoyed.

This is an important lesson for me to learn: Enjoy what can be enjoyed – no matter what life situation you are in - . Enjoy what can be enjoyed and strive for something other than progress, possessions, security and success.

Strive for love and happiness, for quality time with those you love, for shared meals with your family and honest communication with your children...Strive for a balance between busy-ness and quiet time, between activity and rest, between commitment and spirituality.

Death is unavoidable, Jesus says. It will come.

It will come for you and for those you love.

You cannot avoid it. But there's something you can avoid.

The thought of death, the thought of all the terrible things that could happen, should not poison your life and your being, your relationships and your feelings.

Look at God's creation, Jesus invites...

Look at nature with all its beauty and abundance...

The world we live in, this earth is meant to be a good place for people to live in and enjoy... Make the most of it.

Birds and flowers don't know any worries, and therefore can be an image of freedom from worries.

We all know that nowadays this is not always true: often birds and plants and many other parts of God's creation are issues we have to worry about...

Pollution and exploitation of nature is a major problem.

And we might be able to worry less, had we cared more,

had humanity over the decades and centuries cared more...

But nevertheless, nature still has amazing beauty to offer.

So let's take it as an image of the happy and light side of life, just as Jesus did.

Birds and flowers, lilies

and you may carry on:

dandelions and daisies, ducks and fish, and all those things especially small children love to discover and enjoy in nature...

Nature can help us to learn a freedom from worrying that makes our lives happier and easier.

Last but not at all least Jesus speaks about the kingdom of God

and attracts our attention to peace, justice and fullness of life.

...to those things we all need for life, that we hunger and thirst for as the Bible would say: community and friendship and love,

God's will on earth and the beginning of his kingdom of hope.

Don't worry, Jesus seems to say, but live... and love.

Love is the secret of it all – especially for parents...

Love can give you the strength for life.

When you love, you can feel that you have the power to overcome fears and worries.

When you love you can help the world of God become the place it was always meant to be. When you love you can stand up for peace and justice and humanity.

When you love, you can relax, take things easy, wait when it is wise to wait and let things happen when there is nothing to be done.

When you love you can discover all the wonderful opportunities within your own and other people's lives...

When you love you can trust in the source of all love, and that is God.

When you love, you can start to see the world with different eyes...

May we all, and especially Amanda and Sven today, always see one another and our children with the eyes of love. May we all see the world we live in with the eyes of love.

And may stories of love and hope, stories of lilies and happiness always be ours.

We can take them from the Bible.

We can take them from other books. And they can come from many different parts of the world with many different traditions. We can read them, or they are told to us...

We can take them from other people's lives and experiences,

because – can you remember? – stories do not belong to those who write them, but to those who need them.

Amen.