

God's Kingdom and God's Justice **Sermon on Matthew 6: 25-34**

The text we have just heard may at first sight look like a harmless nice piece of poetry about nature: birds and flowers and their beauty. These may even tempt the preacher to lay the passage aside.

What have lilies and birds to do with the daily demands of my life?

... no sowing, no reaping, no gathering, no toiling, no spinning...

Working does not seem necessary.

So, no working, and no worrying? I am not that naive, I am tempted to think.

Life is not like that...

Life is about... what?

And then my second look at the text reveals a good deal more than I had expected. Had I understood the "do not worry" as an invitation to take life not all that seriously and live more or less superficially, I could suddenly see the little sentence in a very different context.

Do not worry, because you are of genuine value!

Do not worry, because by worrying you cannot add a single hour to your span of life.

Do not worry, because your heavenly father knows what you need!

Do not worry, but strive for the kingdom of God and work for justice!

And last but not least: do not worry, because today's trouble is enough for today.

Yes to that! I can say it from the bottom of my heart. And suddenly I feel attracted by the text and the treasure that it might hold in store for me.

The kingdom of God and his righteousness...

in other words: it's God's values that count, God's purposes that I shall fulfil, and God's work that I shall do!

So, before I relate this text about anxiety and worry and the encouragement "not to worry" to my own life and to your lives, it may be wise to get an idea what the text meant in Jesus' time.

In the context of the ministry of Jesus, this message may have been intended for his immediate disciples. They had left homes and families to follow Jesus. They'd become travelling teachers just as he was. The message was for people who'd followed an extraordinary and radical call. They'd moved away from traditional and cultural values into a life of nothing else but trust and obedience.

These words were not just given as advice, but as a confrontation to those who may have too little faith. ☺

...who may be hesitant, who need reassurance.

The disciples around Jesus were told not be anxious, because the one who called them to this radical style of life was also the creator who lovingly provided and provides for the whole creation. He will finally bring the whole creation into his kingdom – that is a promise and gives a perspective.

So, talking about birds and flowers is not an unrealistic and romantic piece of poetry but a confession of God's providential care and unconditional love which is there for all his people and every living being on this earth. It is not a promise that life will be easy, but an invitation to a life filled with challenges, surprises and wonders that, if we choose it, will give us a purpose and a direction.

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, to protect ourselves against their overwhelming force, and not let them poison our life.

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.

And some of those Jesus 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, and 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 wealth, 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.

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. Nature has amazing beauty to offer. Let's take it as an image of the happy and light side of life, just as Jesus did.

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.

Strive first for the kingdom of God and his justice...

Righteousness or justice...

...they don't come naturally or passively to us. We have to seek them.

Justice is something we are told to seek first, along with God's kingdom.

Are we doing that?

What are our primary issues in everyday life? Justice? God? His kingdom?

Honestly – what is really important to us on a daily basis?

What do we value most? Justice? ...or easiness and comfort, peace and quiet?

Do we dare to risk confrontation and speak out loud what hinders justice in this world, in this land, in this place? Or do we prefer to be everybody's darling and keep our mouths shut?

What do you think about as you lie awake at night?

What aspect of your life occupies most of your energy?

How does your life reflect your desire to seek God's kingdom and God's justice?

What would the world be like if every living being recognised God's justice, his kingdom, and his loving presence?

What would it be like if everyone in the world lived in the fullness of faith?

And how can we be a part of helping to bring God's kingdom about?

I am sure we all have different and more or less intimate answers to some of these questions. I am of course not asking you to share yours. Nor do I find much of what I worry about first thing in the morning when I lie awake and can't yet pluck up the energy to get up, appropriate to be shared here.

But some things must spring to mind that must be shared, when – for example – we watch the news or read the newspaper.

Do I think and pray enough for social justice, and an equal sharing of the resources in this world? ...for education of women and children no matter in which country and culture they live? ...for democracy and fair and just economies not just here in the rich west but also in the heart of Africa or in far eastern countries? ... for healthy and safe working conditions of employees everywhere and a fair pay for every single one of them?

Do I see with open eyes and a passionate heart what happens with the poor, the unemployed, the underprivileged and the discriminated against in our society?

And if I see it, do I invest enough time to help them and work for a change? Do I silently suffer from an unfair health insurance system, or do I openly and publicly speak about it and try to change the situation? Do I turn my eyes away from inhuman immigration laws or do I protest against them?

There are so many things that need to be done...on our journey with God in his kingdom...- ...so many ways in which we can and must make a difference if we want this kingdom to come true for all God's people.

But how?

By no means do I want to add to your worries with this list of questions. I want to encourage and motivate you to seek first for the kingdom of God and his justice. Nothing more and nothing less.

Do the things I do on a daily basis increase justice? That is the question. And do the things other people do on a daily basis help God's kingdom come true?

Justice in the Bible is never an issue of individuals only! Justice in the Bible happens always in community and for the whole of a community.

The work for justice must be done in a group. And the justice that is brought about can never ever only happen for one person, one people, one part of the world. God's justice will only be realised and achieved when it is true for the whole world and every single living being in it.

Justice is a community issue and can only be achieved when many hands help together and many hearts beat according to the same rhythm.

So, let's join hands and forces and work together for justice which never comes alone but always comes along with peace and with love.

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

Love is probably the secret of it all! ...the only answer...the only measure...

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 justice and peace 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 that can be done.

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...walk it with different feet and work in it with different hands – the hands of God.

And if you remember that at least once every day, and at the same time remember not to worry, you may come a great big step further ahead on your path towards God who is it all: love, peace and justice forever. Amen.

Prayer

God has created me

to do him some definite service:

he has committed some work to me

which he has not committed to another.

I have my mission –

I may never know it in this life,

but I shall be told it in the next.

Somehow I am necessary for his purposes:

as necessary in my place

as an archangel in his.

I have a part in this great work;

I am a link in a chain,

a bond of connection between persons.

He has not created me for nothing.

I shall do good, I shall do his work;

I shall be an angel of peace,

a preacher of truth in my own place.

Deign to fulfil your high purposes in me.

I am here to serve you, to be yours,

to be your instrument. Amen.