

Community Presbyterian Church  
Cedar City, Utah  
Pastor John Guthrie

“No Worries”  
Isaiah 48.8-15, Matthew 6.24-34

I've given today's message the title “No Worries,” which reminds me of Australia, perhaps from watching too many movies. Be that as it may, here is an Australia story for your consideration.

A Texas farmer goes to Australia for a vacation. There he meets an Aussie farmer and gets talking. The Aussie shows off his big wheat field and the Texan says, "Oh! We have wheat fields that are at least twice as large". Then they walk around the ranch a little, and the Aussie shows off his herd of cattle. The Texan immediately says, "We have longhorns that are at least twice as large as your cows". The conversation has, meanwhile, almost died when the Texan sees a herd of kangaroos hopping through the field. He asked, "And what are those"? The Aussie replies with an incredulous look, "Don't you have any grasshoppers in Texas"?

The problem with the Sermon on the Mount, of course, is that it challenges us so deeply and fundamentally. We spent the last two weeks looking at six of the ways that Jesus commands us to nurture a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, the preeminent, ultra-righteous Jews of first century Palestine.

As we studied the six antitheses we found that we are subject to judgment even when we are angry with a sister or a brother. We have committed adultery every time we cast an admiring glance at someone else. Divorce is forbidden except under a very limited set of circumstances. We are not allowed to swear by anything, but simply to say yes or no. When someone strikes us on one cheek, we are to turn the other, metaphorically speaking; in other words, retaliation is forbidden. And we are to love our enemies by what we say and do, and we are to pray for them.

We are to be perfect, even as our Father in heaven is perfect. We wrestled enough with those commandments over the last two weeks; I bring them up only to remind you of the impossible requirements placed on Jesus' listeners so long ago, and therefore on us, by what we read in Matthew chapters 5 to 7.

So it is only in keeping with the general tenor of the sermon that we are told in this passage from chapter 6 that we are not to worry. Frankly, it was easier to preach this message a few years ago than it is to do so today. Today we are hopefully, fearfully, possibly emerging from the deepest and most damaging recession since the Great Depression of the 1930's. One commentator writes this: “As the Great Recession technically ended, the seemingly permanent state of economic depression was referred to by some as the "New Normal" as massive long-term unemployment, weakened labor unions , falling home prices, and foreclosures continued despite economic growth

resuming at a low rate. Pessimists predict that the stagnant economy might continue for a decade and mirror Japan's "Lost Decade".<sup>1</sup>

I know, and you know, of many in our community, families, and church who have suffered in through the recession and its aftermath. How are we to hear and comprehend Jesus' message in our current economic climate?

Jesus says, “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?” God feeds the birds who do not labor for their food. God clothes the lilies of the field in stunning raiment, and they do not labor, either. How much more will he feed and clothe us, we of little faith! Jesus tells us, “your heavenly Father knows you need all these things.”

“But, he says, strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, then you will receive all these things as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.”

So that's a quick synopsis of what it says. Very interesting, but we are still left with the question of how to live it. Allow me to take a quick poll: how many of you wonderful saints of God can remember ever having passed through an entire day without worrying about something? Hands up! Just as I suspected: I can't do it either.

So then, are we doomed to the fate of being thrown into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth? (That's one of Matthew's favorite expressions.)

Jesus knows we can't stop worrying. The Holy Spirit he left to be our advocate, friend, and guide knows we can't do it. And surely our heavenly Father knows we can't do it. It is deeply ingrained in us to worry.

While cruising at 40,000 feet, the airplane shuddered and a passenger looked out the window. "Good lord!" he cried, "one of the engines just blew up!" Other passengers left their seats and came running over; suddenly the aircraft was rocked by a second blast as yet another engine exploded on the other side.

The passengers were in a panic now, and even the stewardesses couldn't maintain order. Just then, standing tall and smiling confidently, the pilot strode from the cockpit and assured everyone that there was nothing to worry about.

His words and his demeanor seemed to make most of the passengers feel better, and they sat down as the pilot calmly walked to the door of the aircraft. There, he grabbed several packages from under the seats and began handing them to the flight attendants.

Each crew member strapped the package to their backs. "Say," spoke up an alert passenger, "aren't those parachutes?" The pilot replied, "Yes, sir. They are indeed."

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<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia.com, "Great Recession."

The passenger went on, "But I thought you said there was nothing to worry about?" "There isn't," replied the pilot as a third engine exploded. "We're going to get help."

As we saw over the past two weeks, it is critical for us to remember the context from which Jesus preaches the Sermon on the Mount. It is the same perspective from which he speaks all the time. It is from the perspective of one who knows intimately and joyfully what the kingdom of heaven is really all about. It is the one whose ministry is marked by the statement, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

Jesus speaks from a kingdom perspective. He knows well that we are going to worry. We are going to worry about the economy, where food and rent money is going to come from tomorrow or next week or next month. We worry as our bodies age and begin to give out on us. We worry about contracting cancer or some other terrifying disease. We worry about the security of our retirement funds and the performance of the stock market. If we have a job, we worry about its stability, and if we don't have one we worry about how long it will be before we can secure one. And in the meantime, how do we pay our expenses?

We worry about whether our old set of wheels is going to hold up for another year, because surely we can't afford another one now. We worry about paying for insurance for that set of wheels. We worry about the debt we have already incurred, and whether or not we will be able to make the minimum payments. We worry about particular members of our families who are fighting disease or economic problems of their own, or mental or emotional illness or substance abuse, or who simply seem to be dead set on pursuing a path that can to nowhere but disaster.

I have almost certainly left one of your most persistent worries out. The magnitude of them is vast.

Yet Jesus, speaking from his kingdom perspective, tells us not to worry about what we will eat or drink or wear. "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today."

Clearly we can only imperfectly obey this latest impossible commandment, but (as noted over the last two weeks), that doesn't mean we get to ignore it. Yes, thanks to the grace of God which is ours through Jesus, we are forgiven every time we worry, and especially if we remember to repent of that worry. But we don't get to ignore the clear commandment of this passage.

We have to be very certain, in all of our worrying, that we don't make wealth our god. We can't serve both God and wealth. We have to choose. So even though we need food and drink and clothing, we cannot make these things our gods. That is surely the way to ruin, where there will indeed be weeping and gnashing of teeth. We can't serve them both. We have to choose.

Strive first for the kingdom of God. Strive first for the kingdom of God. Strive first for the kingdom of God. What does that mean, after all? Well, at least in part it means that

we are to be relying on the Holy Spirit to give us the strength and persistence to look beyond our worries, and to strive for the kingdom first.

That means, as I understand it, that we are to be looking for those kingdom seedlings (see Matthew chapter 13), and we are to nurture and care for them wherever we may see them sprouting. We are to be diligent in study of scripture and in prayer. And by the way, study of scripture is beyond what you get here on Sunday. Study of scripture is study of scripture. Doing the hard work of wrestling with straightforward passages and difficult passages, and preferably doing so with others, because it is so easy for us to fool ourselves. If you are not now participating in a strong Bible study, will you make a commitment to join one soon? And are you prepared to experience what in-depth study of the Bible may do to you?

Striving for the kingdom of heaven means being actively involved in the many and varied ministries of this church, as we work together to nurture little kingdom seedlings here and there. These many ministries need you. And if one doesn't exist to which you feel called, then let's explore if God is calling us to start a new one.

Striving for the kingdom means being here. Really. It means growing in love and devotion to those friends and members who form this body of Christ known as Community Presbyterian Church. And you can't do that growing if you are not here. The only way the bonds of love can be developed is if we spend time in ministry and fellowship together.

Striving for the kingdom means serving outside the walls of this building. It means looking for kingdom sprouts in the world at large, and nurturing them wherever they may be found. If we are focused on ourselves only, then we are no better than a country club, and we are called to much more than that. We are to serving in our town and nation and the world, caring for those who are hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, lonely, and imprisoned.

Striving for the kingdom means sharing the good news of Jesus with that same community and with the world. Do you feel like you have received the best news that could ever be delivered? That we need no longer be afraid of anything, including death, that Jesus has conquered already every evil that could entrap us or drag us down? That in Jesus there is life abundant and full and purposeful and joyous beyond all expression? Or maybe I'm doing a poor job of expressing your own experience of Jesus. Regardless of what it is, one way of striving for the kingdom is sharing the good news, and that means primarily with your friends.

I can't stop worrying. You can't stop worrying. I know that you can't stop worrying, and you know that I can't stop worrying. Maybe we shouldn't worry so much about worrying, and instead strive first for the kingdom of heaven. We have to be absolutely sure that we don't make wealth our god. Beyond that, we are called to be faithful residents of the kingdom of heaven, striving to live as we are called to do.

And maybe, if we do that, we won't worry quite as much, and instead trust in the God who, according to Isaiah, answers us in a time of favor and helps us on a day of

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salvation, a God who keeps us, saves us from hunger and thirst and scorching wind and sun, who leads us beside streams of water, a God who comforts his people and has compassion on his suffering ones. A God who will never forget us. A God who will never forget us. Amen.