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Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon :
February 16, 2020 “The Lilies of the Field”

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Readings: Matt 6: 25-end & Romans 8:18-25

The heading in my bible for the section containing today’s Gospel Reading is “Do not worry”. Easier said than done, might be your initial response. Certainly, worrying about the future is a common characteristic of very many people, throughout the whole range of possible concerns - small personal things, family matters, our national situation and world-wide problems, existing and emerging. Worry can be a great time waster – using time and emotional energy, going round in circles without useful outcome. Anxiety, unaccompanied by action to address it, is purposeless, and really not fitting for us - people who recognise that they are within the scope of God’s all-encompassing love and care.

Through most of today’s Gospel Jesus it seems as if Jesus is focussing on worries about food and clothes. He tells the crowd not to ask “what will we eat and drink?” or “what will we wear?” The birds eat well though they do not plan ahead, and just take what comes. Nor can we hope to look more attractive than the wild flowers, merely by the way we dress. It’s pointless to worry about such things and indicates an unhealthy preoccupation with appearances.

But the issue is much wider than that. Jesus wants us to stop worrying not just about small personal things like choice of food or clothes. Jesus is clear that no worries about the future should damage our peace of mind and ability to cope with the problems of today.

So, Jesus wouldn’t have been suggesting that shepherds should not work hard to shear their sheep at the appropriate time, and store the wool appropriately, so that the people could be adequately clothed. Nor that farmers should not do everything they could to ensure that the harvest was gathered in before it could be spoilt by inclement weather or over-ripeness. Jesus, like God our Father in Heaven, was concerned for our bodily as well as our spiritual well-being. Why else would he have spent so much time and energy healing the sick? He certainly wouldn’t have wanted to bring on food or clothing shortages by lack of proper planning or urgent necessary action on the part of any of the people he was speaking to. So taking any possible action that can be taken today is not the issue. Do take any action that reasonably can be taken, in relation to anything that worries you. It is positive and necessary, and incidentally, it is in itself a good way of diffusing unnecessary worry.

Small actions that might be taken in relation to concerns that cannot be addressed more comprehensively might include writing oneself a note or adding it to a worry list. We should also not underestimate how much can be done by small actions. For example, drafting (and sending) a

letter to your MP. You might write emphasising your interest in the environment or support for the poor, and your disappointment over the lack of Government action, especially in areas where you have personal knowledge or experience. In my working life I did quite a lot of lobbying of the Government, and I know from that work that politicians typically have two main motivations – one is the good of the nation and its people, and the second is to be re-elected next time round. So action is more likely to be taken speedily and effectively if MPs get the impression that lack of action will be influential on voting decisions at the next election. One letter may seem as insubstantial as a grain of sand, but will contribute to what may be a huge sand dune forcing a change of direction on the part of the Government.

But sometimes there is nothing that can be done, even in relation to serious worries. The time is wrong or inappropriate. We fear that by intervention we may do more harm than good, we don't know what we should do, or there really is nothing we can do.

Hang on though – there is something we can always do. We can pray. As with all prayer, there is a benefit in keeping it simple, and appropriate to the time and place.

For example, some worries ambush one in the dead of the night. It is so easy to let them dominate your mind. You have little ability to actually tackle a problem in the small hours due to a natural night-time lack of energy and focus, yet by damaging your sleep the worry impacts your ability to do anything about them (or anything else) at a more appropriate time – but still they go round and round. So the only practical thing to do is to pray. There is no need for many words. God knows your problems already, and knows better than you how they might be remedied. Lie quietly, not trying to sleep, and open yourself to God's presence, sharing with him the particular issue that concerns you. If you lose focus on God, his knowledge and power, bring yourself back with a few words – perhaps "Lord have mercy", or just "My God".

And if none of these strategies help diffuse your worry, and enable you to get back to effective service for God and humanity, try Jesus' suggestion - remember the beauty of the birds, the flowers and the rest of nature. Praise and thank God for them. There is nothing like praising God for lightening your own heart as well as expressing your love for Him.

Our objective is well expressed by the Collect for Purity, which we recited at the beginning of this service:

"Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden, cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy Name, through Christ our Lord.
Amen"

In the name of the Father ...