

“Worrying Like a Christian”
Matthew 6:25-34
2nd Sunday in Lent

March 1, 2026
Westminster, Greenville
Ben Dorr

This past Monday, we had an Emergency Preparedness Training, right here in the sanctuary, for ushers and elders and staff, ...the purpose of which was to help make sure that in different potential emergencies, our leadership would know what to do.

It’s helpful to think these things through ahead of time, right?

After all, questions come up.
Questions that you’ve never thought of before.

For example, during the training, I had a memory of the time that I was serving a church in Indiana, years ago, and in the middle of the funeral service I was leading one afternoon, tornado sirens went off. At that time, it had never occurred to me that there could be a tornado warning in the middle of a funeral.

So, this past Monday, during our training, I asked the gathered group:

“Are there tornado sirens here in South Carolina?”
Someone attending the training said, “No, no sirens.”

“Then how would we know there’s a tornado?”
“Ben...everyone’s iPhone would be going off at the same time!”

Right...how could I be so clueless?

After all, I suspect there are TWO THINGS that every single one of us almost ALWAYS brings to church.

You know what those two things are, right?

- a) Your phone.
- b) And your worries.

You heard our text for today.

Jesus says:

*“...do not worry about your life, what you will eat...
or about your body, what you will wear.*

*“...can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of
life?”*

Even if the answer to that question is always no, it doesn't keep us from carrying our worries around with us, right?

Did any of you bring your worries with you today?
I know I brought mine.

I bet I can name a few of the worries present in this room right now...

- A family member, who happens to be sick...someone in this room is worried about that.
- Running out of money before you die...I'll bet someone here today, approaching retirement age, is a bit worried about that.

In *The New York Times* yesterday morning, the headline read:

“U.S. and Israel Attack Iran”

Should we be worried about this war?

The day before, *The Wall Street Journal* read:

“Stocks slid on the last trading day of February, capping a month marked by growing anxiety about the impact of AI.”

Should we be worried about AI?

Or maybe you don't have time for artificial intelligence right now, because you've got more important matters on your mind:

the stability of your child...

the safety of your aging parent...

or maybe you're a teenager who's worried about finding the college that will be the best fit for you.

Into this bundle of anxiety, Jesus says:

“...do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own.”

Look, let me be the first to say that worry can cut both ways.

On the one hand, being worried about someone else CAN be a helpful thing. Like when our younger son was 17 months old, and the doctors said he had a virus, and a week later it was another virus, and a week after that yet another virus...and some parental instinct in my wife said: “This is NOT just a virus.”

So she took him to the after-hours clinic.

The after-hours doctor—she drove my wife and my son to the ER.

The ER doctor said: it looks like leukemia.

It's a good thing you brought him in.

The medical staff told us later that 85% of his blood at that time was leukemia cells.

Thank God...my wife was worried!

On the other hand, we all know what happens when our worry goes too far...

The late preacher and Harvard professor Peter Gomes once told about a commencement address that he gave at a very posh girls' school in Manhattan.

"Many of the brightest and best of [these] girls went on...to elite colleges," Gomes writes.

"They were able...young women...
and I rejoiced in their achievement."

But Gomes also knew that such achievement comes at a cost.
A psychological and emotional cost.
So he decided to use, as the basis of his remarks, our text for today.

Jesus' words: DO NOT WORRY...

Many of the graduates told him afterwards how much they appreciated what he had to say to them that day.

But NOT all in the audience were pleased.

At the reception, the father of one of those graduating girls walked up to Dr. Gomes, "with fire in his eyes and ice in his voice," and told Peter Gomes in no uncertain terms that his remarks....were a bunch of nonsense.

“It was anxiety that got my daughter into this school, it was anxiety that kept her here, it was anxiety that got her into Yale, it will be anxiety that will keep her there, and it will be anxiety that will get her a good job.”

“You are selling nonsense.”¹

Is it nonsense?
Or can our worries overtake us?
Can they push us into places that God never intended us to be?

The poet, essayist, and novelist Wendell Berry once asked the question:

“What are people for?”²

I think the SAME QUESTION lies behind Jesus’ words to us today.

“Is life not more than food, and the body more than clothing?”

Are you and I created by God...so we can attend the best college, or land the best job, or play the stock market well...is that really what we were created to do?

Or were we made by God for something deeper?

Allow me to submit an idea.
It’s not a new idea.
You’ve heard this idea before.

¹ Peter J. Gomes, *The Good Book: Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart*, New York: Avon Books, 1996.

² Wendell Berry, *What Are People For? Essays*, Berkley, CA: Counterpoint, 2010.

You and were made...to share the good news of the gospel.
 To embody the grace of God made known in Jesus Christ.
 That's the reason for our existence.

Now I'm not talking about sharing the good news by knocking on strangers' doors, asking our neighbor if they've been saved, trying to twist somebody's arm into believing that Jesus is their Savior too.

That's not it.

I'm talking about THREE QUESTIONS you can ask yourself every morning...in fact, I'd like you to memorize these questions by the time this service is over.

How can I share the love of God today?
 How can I show kindness to my neighbor or the stranger who is struggling today?

How can I be the generous person God created me to be, with all the gifts that God has given me?

Some of you are familiar with the writer, Fred Buechner.

Buechner died a couple of years ago now, but one of the things that I really appreciated about his writing was the way in which he was honest about his worries.

"I remember," writes Buechner, "an especially dark time in my life. One of my children was sick, and in my anxiety for her I was in my own way as sick as she was."

Buechner says that one day the phone rang.

It was a friend, Lou Patrick.
Not an especially close friend.

But they knew one another.
Lou Patrick was, at the time, the pastor of Trinity Presbyterian Church, up in Charlotte.

So when Buechner, who was living in Vermont, picked up the phone and heard Lou Patrick's voice, he assumed that Lou was calling from his church in Charlotte just...to find out how he was doing.

No, Lou replied, I'm not in Charlotte.
I'm about 20 minutes away.
I'm not here on business.
I'm here to see you.

In other words, Lou Patrick had traveled 800 miles, up to Vermont, to call Fred Buechner and let him know that he was there and ask him whether would he like "an extra friend around for a day or two."

He didn't even know if Buechner would be in town!

"We just took a couple of walks, had a meal or two together..."
Buechner writes. "I don't remember even spending much time talking about my troubles with him..."

But, Buecher says:

"I have never forgotten how he came all that distance just for that..."

"Just twenty minutes down the road did you say?
Good God, you must be crazy!"

"And that is just it," Buechner concludes.

“We are called to be crazy like that...to be the hands and feet and heart of Christ to each other [like that].”³

Now...maybe it's crazy for me to think that you can memorize three questions during the course of a sermon.

But I think you can do it.
Do you remember the questions?

How can I share the love of God today?
How can I show kindness to my neighbor or the stranger who is struggling today?

How can I be the generous person God created me to be, with all the gifts that God has given me?

You know, when I think about those three questions, when they are at the forefront of my mind, you know what I STOP thinking about so much?

My worries...

I hope you realize that you can consider those questions any time.

Not just during this worship service.
You can think about them at home.
Or at work. Or on your way to the airport.

Anybody going to the airport in the next couple weeks?

³ Frederick Buechner, “The Church,” in *Secrets in the Dark: A Life in Sermons*, New York: HarperCollins, 2006.

I'm reminded of a story about a soldier who went to the airport.
The teller of the story was a seminary professor.

This professor was invited to speak at a military base in December, so he arrived at the airport, where he was greeted by a soldier named Ralph. After they had introduced themselves, they headed toward the baggage claim.

But all the way down the concourse, RALPH kept disappearing:
--once to help an older woman whose suitcase had fallen
open;
--once to lift two toddlers up so they could see Santa Claus;
--and AGAIN, to give directions to someone who was lost.

EACH TIME, Ralph came back with a big smile on his face
and picked up the conversation where he had left off.

The professor could NOT figure him out....

"Where did you learn to do that?" he asked Ralph.

"Do what?" Ralph said.

"Where did you learn to live like that?"

"Oh" Ralph said, "during the war, I guess."

And, over the course of the next hour or so,
he told the professor about his tour of duty in Vietnam.

About how it was his job to clear mine fields,
and about how he watched one of his friends
after another die in front of his eyes.

"...I learned to live between steps," Ralph said.

"I never knew whether the next one would be my last, so I learned how to get EVERYTHING I could out of the moment between when I picked up my foot and when I put it down again."

*"...Every step I took---it was a whole new world,
and I guess I've just been that way ever since."⁴*

Did you know that you can consider the three questions...in between your steps, and live your answers to those questions, between the time you pick your foot up and put it down again?

I met someone like that once.

I've told some of you before about the evening that I was sitting before the Session of my home church. I was in the ordination process, ready to be approved to move on to the next stage, to become a candidate for ministry.

And the Session at my home church was happy, and I was excited, and frankly, most of what they said to me that evening went in one ear and out the other.

It was like that until one father on the Session spoke up. I didn't know him well, but I knew of him.

He was middle-aged,
had a wife and children,
but sometime after I left that church to go to college,
his son, who was a few years younger than me,

⁴ I am indebted to the Rev. Mark Ramsey for this story.

was in an auto accident.

This father's teenage boy was driving to take the SAT test on a Saturday morning.

It was a foggy morning.

And he was in a line of cars, and that line crossed some railroad tracks, and there wasn't a lever to block the tracks...and because of the fog, he never saw the oncoming train...

Needless to say, it was a SHATTERING event for that family.

This father looked at me on that evening that I came before the Session to be a candidate for ministry.

He said, "Ben, I see a lot of me in you. You're goal-oriented. You like to get things done. You've had success in your life, and I don't doubt that you'll have more."

Then he paused and put his head down.

And it was quiet in that room.

Then he looked up, and said:

"Ben, don't forget to take time to stop and smell the roses."

Now, that father wasn't just telling me to pay attention to the roses, right?

He was reminding me to pay attention to God.

He was reminding me that the grace of God is larger and deeper and wider than ANYTHING I was worried about at that moment...

Do you remember the three questions?

How can I share the love of God today?

How can I show kindness to my neighbor or the stranger who might be struggling today?

How can I be the generous person God created me to be, with all the gifts that God has given me?

When you answer those questions, I have no worries that the grace that was at work in that father...that very same grace will be at work in you, it will spread through you...

Amen.