

## **"Don't worry, worry"**

September 5, 2021 at First Church in Cambridge, Congregational, UCC

Jaz Buchanan

*Texts: Matthew 6:24-34*

First Church, it is so good to be back. To be joining you here in this sanctuary and in your home sanctuaries through our livestream.

It is September. First of all, what?!

And in this new, ever-evolving hybrid world.

Taking it one day at a time.

(taking it one day at a time) is not totally new to us, is it? For a while now, we have exercised our uncertainty muscles and practiced radical flexibility in how we live our day-to-day lives. I think in some ways we have gotten pretty good at -okay, this is what today looks like... next day, okay, curveball, rates have gone backup, alright we are doing things differently today. Sometimes I notice that happens for me mid-conversation with a friend. I have had moments where I am outside without a mask talking to a friend and then all of a sudden, I see a group of people approaching to walk past us and I'm like you know... never mind I am going to put this back on.

We are constantly negotiating, figuring out our own discomforts and comforts, and checking in with loved ones to know theirs.

This is the life we are living in.

So, for Jesus in our gospel of Mathew this morning to just come out and say, "hey, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself"

How can I not worry?

*And yet*, I will admit -that as we experience something like this pandemic, we are reminded of how precious life can be. How precious being in this sanctuary can be.

I can see an argument for not worrying. I have heard folks say that worrying does not necessarily change anything. Even Jesus said, "Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? What will happen will happen.

I know when I worry, I deprive myself of fully appreciating life's precious moments. Of connecting to God more intimately with each breath I take.

Not necessarily the big moments. Like a wedding or a graduation. The little ones. The in between moments. Sharing a laugh, the feeling of warm sunshine, a cool breeze, a comforting cup of tea.

Several years ago, a dear friend sent me a video of Neil Gaiman's Commencement speech from the University of the Arts. Naturally, I watched again this summer after graduating. It is an incredible speech and I highly recommend watching it. He talks about the greatest advice he had ever been given. I quote,

"When I agreed to give this address, I started trying to think what the best advice I'd been given over the years was.

And it came from Stephen King twenty years ago, at the height of the success of *Sandman*. I was writing a comic that people loved and were taking seriously. King had liked *Sandman*...and he saw the madness, the long signing lines, all that, and his advice was this:

*"This is really great. You should enjoy it."*

And I didn't. Best advice I got that I ignored. Instead I worried about it. I worried about the next deadline, the next idea, the next story...And I didn't stop and look around and go, *this is really fun*. I

wish I'd enjoyed it more. It's been an amazing ride. But there were parts of the ride I missed, because I was too worried about things going wrong..."

That was the hardest lesson for me, I think: to let go and enjoy the ride, because the ride takes you to some remarkable and unexpected places." End quote.

Neil talks about how even in the midst of success, he worried. Even when he seemed to have it all, he worried. It took away from his ability to enjoy the moment. I think he is right – we risk missing out in the fun. In the good days. In the awe and wonder. In this moment right now and that is a sacred, precious gift from God.

*This is all important, and yet I am not entirely satisfied.* There is this tension that I am not too sure what to do with. I feel uncomfortable walking away with a lesson like "don't worry about anything, God will provide." It feels a bit passive, and a little entitled. Instructions for those who can afford to do nothing. But I believe with my heart that there is more here, that there is good news...

For this passage was written in first century Palestine. Matthew's Jesus tells his audience to not worry about food, drink and clothing – to the very people who struggled to acquire basic necessities to survive. How can you not worry when you can so easily starve?

This is where I will begin to elaborate on the tension I struggle with.

*Letting go, living in the present, forgoing worrying AND recognizing the moments when worrying can fuel necessary action.*

Just this past week, we were devastated by Hurricane Ida – a hurricane that took nearly 50 lives. Seeing the news unfold first in Louisiana and then in NJ and NY...was utterly heartbreaking.

And only a few days before, we all clung to our seats as we withdrew United States troops from Afghanistan, praying for peace and safety for all involved.

The pandemic is not the only thing we hold. We hold a lot in our heart's day in and day out. And sometimes, unbearable forms of worry and grief.

When I hold all these lives we lost just in this past week in my heart, I question if all worry is bad. I am not talking about the unbearable worry by those directly impacted, I am talking about the worry that leads the rest of us to respond to these devastating moments with love and grace. Each person who extended a hand, rescued their neighbors, shared food and resources.

This leads me to wonder if at the surface, Mathew's Jesus is telling us not to worry, but that maybe there is also a subtle call to worry at the same time? For Jesus says, "Seek first her kin-dom and her righteousness"

When we imagine, we pray and seek God's kin-dom, could there then be an upside to worrying? For worrying has pushed us to rise up and protest... to challenge oppressive structures, economic injustices, capitalistic healthcare...genuine worry and anxiety for humanity and all God's creation. It has pushed us to act. To do something.

I believe worrying can be useful and can be used for social good. It depends on how we use it. It can cause us to close ourselves off, or lash out in anger, OR we can recognize worry for what it is, trust in God and act in community and in faith.

*Going back in time for just a moment...I believe this was in summer of 2019...* Never Again Action – a Jewish grassroots organization led this large march from the City's Holocaust Memorial to South Bay ICE detention facility in Boston. The group locked arms around the facility so that no cars or agents could enter or leave. They essentially shut down the detention center for hours before they were arrested. It was incredible - a powerful example of a community that worried and then acted in faith to protect

those who they knew were most vulnerable, who were at risk of being separated from their families, their kids and deported.

*A therapist once told me* (by the way this is free advice, so if I have lost you up until this point, now is your chance to listen in, therapy ain't cheap), she told me that the goal is to not rid myself of worry or anxiety because that is almost impossible. Instead of learning how to fight it, I should learn how to sit with it, watch it like a leaf falling through the sky into a river and floating away. Recognizing that it is anxiety and that I will not let it rob me, but rather motivate me. She assured me that anxiety can also be a good thing. People can use it as an instinct to make a situation better. (for example, worry can help me notice if a person is left out of a conversation and change what is happening so that they can be more included) Maybe those instinctual moments are God working through us. And for the first time I saw my anxiety as a strength. Something that I can use to motivate me and empower me.

I don't think that the good news of this passage is that there is no need for us to ever worry.

Rather, I think we should not worry, worry. Yes, not worry and worry.

We should not worry by surrendering our hearts to God, appreciating the gift of life. Being as present as we can, attentive to this world.

And we should worry by entrusting our lives to God, seeking God's kin-dom - allowing ourselves to be motivated (not paralyzed) by our fears, giving God a chance to work through us. Giving us a chance to act as a faith community.

And that my siblings in Christ, I believe is the good news.