

Trusting in the midst of anxiety
Matthew 6:19-34

What did you worry about this week? A primary concern of mine, which I imagine many of you shared, was how to stay cool. And beyond the immediate concern of this week’s heat is the looming worry about climate change—that the hot spells are growing more intense and we’re not going to solve this by simply adding more cooling systems. I have other worries on my list too:

a) the situation of homelessness in our community, including several people who are connected to our church,

b) the slow and conflicted efforts for immigration reform in our country and the uncertainty and fear this causes for many families. I also worry about

c) the racial disparities and inequalities that continue in our country as a legacy of slavery and segregation, brought to the fore again by the trial of George Zimmerman for the slaying of Treyvon Martin.

It’s not hard to create a worry list!

Each Sunday this summer we’ve read together the passage from Matthew 6 that tells us not to worry. Have you noticed and wondered about the first word of the passage, “therefore?” What did Jesus say just prior to these words that led up to the therefore? What was the worry, the concern, that he was addressing?

Allow me to read the five verses that immediately precede our reading:

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal (and we might add: where banks fail and stock markets crash); but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

“No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. (6:19-23)

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear....”

Bringing these two portions of scripture together helps us see that this “do not worry” passage is not a teaching against making a living or thinking about where the next meal is coming from, but rather about our orientation to life, particularly to the material things of life. The worry is that there is not, or will not be enough, so my primary goal and activity is ensuring that *I (and my immediate family)* have enough without thought of God or of others.

The middle portion of what I read, the verses that may seem the most obscure to us and perhaps out of place, about the eye being the lamp of the body, actually serves as a key for understanding this section. Glen Stassen, who wrote *Living the Sermon on the Mount*, which one of our adult classes studied last spring, explains that the best rendering of those verses is: If your eye is *generous*, then your whole body will be filled with health, but if your eye is *greedy or stingy* your whole body will be filled with darkness. “Acting greedily and not respecting God rightly,” according to Stassen, “distort our vision and result in foolishness.”¹ Stassen goes on to say that “every time Jesus teaches about foolishness, it is about someone looking to the wrong source in a drive for worthiness, self-righteousness, honor, or reputation.”

¹ Glen Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount*. Jossey-Bass, 2006, 127.

Recall the story of Jesus, recorded in Luke 12:15-21, about the rich man who had a large harvest and ran out of space to store his crops. His answer was to build greater barns, all focused on how he would benefit. Luke records it this way: “[The man] said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.” But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?”’ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

We quickly see a pattern in this story. The man is totally self-centered: I, I, I...my, my my. The vision of this person—his perspective on life, is, first of all, that he gets all the credit for his large harvests, regardless of who created the earth and provides the sun and rain, and secondly, that he alone deserves to benefit from the abundance. I work hard; it’s mine to decide. He fails to recognize that he is part of creation, that he has received a gift that is meant to be shared. How different if he had considered building a barn for the community so some of the excess could be shared.

This is what a group of undocumented Mexican construction workers in New York did some years back, according to a documentary I saw some time ago. Each man individually sent remittances back to his family in Mexico. One payday, one of the workers had an idea and shared it with his fellow workers. “It’s fine,” he said “for us to benefit our families, but shouldn’t we also think about our community. What if we pooled some of our money for a community project back in our home town?” So they decided to contribute funds toward building a baseball stadium—a simple one, of course, but all built by local labor, providing employment for their home community as well as a sports facility for a favorite game.

When Jesus called the attention of his listeners to the birds, the lilies and the grass, he was not saying they didn’t have to work at all, that they could simply trust God to provide everything. Instead he was showing God’s active involvement in creation. God has created everything that is around us and God cares deeply for it. God desires that everyone benefits from these gifts. Jesus says we can be generous toward others—we need not hoard—because God is generous in creation. When we become greedy, thinking and planning only for our own welfare, we disrespect the loving intentions of our creator. Ultimately our greed as humans, the collective lifestyle of desiring more and more—more things and more comforts—depletes resources and pollutes the environment, causing more worry not less.

I started by sharing my worry list. I won’t ask you to complete it. Rather, I’d like to invite you to help me create a couple “consider the lilies” lists. I’d first like us to make a list of opportunities, small and large, local and international, where we are partnering with God, or can partner, to work in creation to keep our eyes generous, turning our concern into care and action.

- 1) Rounding up at the Seward Coop/Penny Power
- 2) Community meals and picnics
- 3) Helping people move
- 4) Peace & Justice Film Series
- 5) Investing in micro-finance through MEDA
- 6) Donations to food shelf
- 7) MCC sale
- 8) Ten Thousand Villages
- 9) Hospitality—sharing our homes with others
- 10) Taking Sunday floral arrangements to Terry

The second list I’d like us to compile is a comparison list.

<p>If I fear that there’s not enough to go around, that I don’t have enough and I’m on my own, what will be my thoughts/attitudes?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Fear 2) Holding on 	<p>If I believe God is generous and actively involved in creation and wants me to share in this generous way of seeing and living, what will be my thoughts/attitudes?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Hopeful
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3) Isolation	2) Willing to take risks
4) Shame	3) Serenity
5) Overwhelmed	4) Peace
6) Distrust	5) Generosity
7) Anger	6) Connection

Strive first for God's kingdom/rule and God's righteousness/restorative justice. Know that God is active in creation and wants us to be harmonious participants in the fullness. Do not worry.