

Once upon a time I took a survey of people and I asked them: what are you worried about? Here's what I got back: "Losing a job in this economy. Will I lose my house? Will I have money for food? Bad times lie ahead. With the bad economy—theft. Terrorism. Government mistakes. Government intervention in our lives. The cost of living in general is rising steadily. There seems to be a general lack of respect in the way people treat one another. So many people have lost considerable value in homes and other investments. Will God see them through?"

Will God see them through? Will He see us through? Into this stew of uncertainty, the Church has been called to speak and to act. It has been called to speak Jesus' own words that challenge and console. And it has been called to act in ways that embody Jesus' words. Jesus says, "do not worry; do not be anxious about your life; what you will eat or drink or what you will wear. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you." Jesus is teaching us that there are things worth chasing after, and things that aren't. He is comforting us with the knowledge that we live under the Father's care at all times as we seek His Kingdom and righteousness. He is drawing us into himself, orienting our lives in His Gospel, and freeing us from needless anxiety. It is this possibility—this reality—that we are called to bring to an anxious culture.

Sometimes worry needs to be called out and confessed as the sin that it is. Sometimes worry needs to be revealed as the lack of trust in God's provision that it is. Most of the time, we understand this at a gut level, as God's people. You can hear it in the responses I got, when I asked some Christians, "What temptations do you face?" They said: "Doing it all myself and not "giving it to God." Self-reliance. Not relying on God's promise to provide for me. I'm tempted to stay away from downtrodden people. Jealousy. Selfishness. Addiction. It's easy to be caught up in constant worry. Another one: rely on self rather than God. Materialism."

These people are self-diagnosing (with the help of the Law) the fact that worry and anxiety is not just a problem, but that it is temptation, and it is sin. At times, the best approach to worry is to turn from it, confess it, and receive forgiveness from Christ Jesus.

Our Lord takes a little different course to that same goal in this passage from Luke 12. Through a series of gentle questions, Jesus invites his disciples to remember they are living under the Father's care.

He says: "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And if God clothes the grass of the field in greater array than Solomon—grass which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little

faith?”

The invitation to be free from worry is an invitation to remember. It is an invitation to remember the way that your Father has ordered your steps throughout your life. It is an invitation to remember all that Jesus willingly did for you in His Passion, Death and Resurrection. And it is an invitation to remember your identity in Christ. You are a royal servant of the King—and as such, He will not withhold from you the blessings of His kingdom. That doesn’t mean that we will never be grieved or concerned or troubled. But it does mean that our true focus and strength can be the reign of God and his righteousness which has come into our world in Jesus himself.

This is the Word that God has for an anxious, worried world. It is that Word about Jesus that brings real hope to human hearts. Not the vague hope of a better tomorrow; but the aggressive trust that God is making things right in Jesus Christ. Not the hope that wishes for a given outcome in the face of uncertainty, but a straightforward expectation that God will make good on his promises to save and restore and feed and strengthen his people with His Word, His washing, and his very body and blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of sins.

The last question I asked was: How does the Gospel bring hope to you? “They said: “The Gospel is my true reason for living. Christ has done all the work that is needed for me and my loved ones to enjoy an eternity in heaven. I am grateful for the grace and forgiveness Christ offers. I know that no matter how out of control things are or may get—God is in control—everything works together through Him to accomplish His plan. No matter what we endure in this world, we have eternal life. In spite of I, Me, My, God still loves me and forgives me.”

This is the antidote to worry.