

# **The Worry Monster**

## **A Thanksgiving Day Sermon**

The Rev. Debbie Cook, Grace Church In Haddonfield

Thanksgiving Day, Year B, RCL

November 26, 2009

Jesus said, “Do not worry...do not be anxious....”

Yeah, right, Jesus. Were you ever a mom?

I am a champion worrier. I know that as an ordained minister in God’s church, I should practice a non-anxious presence, and studiously work on keeping worry at bay. And I do try, giving myself pep talks and praying through things I am concerned about, but worry accompanies whether I like it or not. It’s a family trait—my mom is even better at it than I am.

Truth be told, I can’t remember a time when I didn’t worry—worry as to whether I would make friends in school, do well in my subjects, whether I would be the last to be picked in gym (now that was often a given). Worried about getting a job, keeping a job, getting into school, being good enough. Worry about getting along with roommates, finding the right guy, the right house, paying the bills. And then, I became a mom....talk about taking it up a notch.

Was the baby eating right, sleeping right, developing right? Checking on them at night to make sure they were still breathing, sleeping on the floor next to the crib when they weren’t feeling well. And as they got older, worrying about whether they shouldn’t be signed up for soccer or T-ball (they never showed any interest, so I didn’t pursue it); about whether they would behave in public, about how much discipline was enough or too much. Teen years brought whole new worries, and when my eldest spent her first semester in college in London (and then another

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semester in Sicily), worry took on a whole new level. As my youngest—the less responsible one—prepares to enter college, it again begins to grow.

And let's not even talk about all the worries that come with parish ministry.

But in all this worrying, I have noticed a couple of things: one, despite all my worrying, I did my best not to stop my kids from having a life, from pursuing things they wanted to do (within reason) just because Mom was freaking out. After all, that is my problem, not theirs. Though, frankly, it winds up being their problem when they're supposed to check in and I don't hear from them and my panic level goes to code red. And two, despite all my worrying, God has given me very little to worry about. Things, to this point at least, have turned out fine (and in saying that, my one superstitious daughter would now be going around looking for some wood to knock on). I did fine in school, made friends, met the man who has been my husband for 25 years, we own our home, can pay our bills, and our children do pretty well.

All of this worrying takes up a tremendous amount of time, and energy--energy that could definitely be used elsewhere for better things. It distracts me from the present, causing me to spend untold minutes stressing over something that often does not even happen. And in the process, it vacuums the joy right out of the present moment, which truly is the only time we have.

And that is what Jesus is referring to—the energy-eating, joy-defeating, strength-sapping nature of worry. No matter what rationalization we may use to convince ourselves otherwise, worrying

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is wasteful. For either we can do something about a situation, and thus should follow through; or we have no control over it, and should let it go and place it in God's hands—and leave it in God's hands. I know my weakness is placing it in God's hands, and when things don't seem to be going as I think they should, I take the situation back out of God's hands and try to 'fix' it or hurry it along—leading me again to worry, and often frustration. Obviously, I am a very slow learner.

Now, with all these wonderfully comforting words Jesus speaks about not worrying about food or clothing and God providing for our needs (not necessarily our 'wants'), we should be aware that Jesus is not telling us to kick back and relax and just let it all arrive on your doorstep. Don't be fooled—this is not the 'Prosperity Gospel', though some may interpret it as such. For those of you not in the know, the 'Prosperity Gospel' takes the assurance that God desires good for us and cares for us, and translates that to "Jesus wants you to be rich!" A theological disconnect if I ever saw one. But what Jesus is saying is that we do need to make God's priorities our own: "strive first for the Kingdom of God and his righteousness" and then rest assured that God will provide for you so you can keep on doing God's work.

And God's work is this: that all come to know God in Christ, and allow their lives to be changed, renewed, by God's transforming love. That we should show forth God's love and concern for justice by working to dismantle the prisons of poverty and hunger, racism, sexism, and classism, and choose to forgive instead of holding grudges, to promote reconciliation instead of fanning conflict. We strive for the Kingdom of God each time we say 'no' to that which gets

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in between God and us, whether it be money, power, prestige, an addiction or an unhealthy relationship; we do kingdom building work in each act of kindness, hospitality, healing.

And something happens to us as we focus on striving for the Kingdom of God—we develop a stronger, more trusting relationship with our Lord, including growing a grateful heart. This trust and gratitude allow us to be more open to seeing God’s abundance in our lives, to experiencing the miracles present each and every day. The more we trust, the less we worry; and the less we worry, the more energy and joy we have to spend in the present moment. A moment that we can truly experience and even enjoy because we not being dragged into the past or propelled into the future by consuming worry.

So this Thanksgiving Day, resolve to stay in the moment, and set your worries aside. Do what you can do, ask for help as needed, and place the rest such as the weather, travel times and conditions, or what your aunt may say about your daughter’s clothing choices in God’s hands—and leave it there. Instead, remember to make God’s priorities your own, and know that one of God’s very special priorities is you, a beloved child of God.

And keeping God’s love is never anything to worry about.

Amen.