

## **WORRY HIMSELF TO DEATH**

**February 27, 2011 – Grace Episcopal Church, Haddonfield, NJ**

**Rev. Dr. Patrick R. Close**

**All of today's readings talk to us about trusting God. Matthew's Gospel in particular talks to us about the opposite of trust and faith, and that is worry and doubt. Worry is endemic in our culture and society. Worry is motivated by fear and accomplishes absolutely nothing! Worry is destructive and leads us to death.**

**I've been watching the Oscar movies this past month on Turner Classic Movie channel. The other day I saw Roland Colman in "Shangri La." It's a wonderful story about people taken up into the Himalayan Mountains to a remote and mysterious place. Right off the bat, several people in the party are worried about how they will get back to their way of life. They are blind to the beauty and peace that surrounds them.**

**I'll let you watch the movie to see how it turns out, but there is one line that struck me. There was a man who greeted the guests and at one points says (about one of the people worrying about getting back) "He worry himself to death." Isn't that appropriate? Aren't we in danger of worrying ourselves to death?**

**Earlier this week I made a list of some of the causes that make us worry. Then I thought about how each generation might be worrying. I'm a parent, so I worry about my kids, their health and well-being, their success, the choices they will make in their lives. I see that many adults worry about jobs, death, their health, money, retirement and impressing others. When it came to the kids, I imagined that they worry about grades, school, getting into college, and their appearance.**

**You can't believe what I discovered last night. Twenty of our young people were here for the 30-hour famine. This is a time when they kids fast for 30 hours to raise awareness about hunger issues and raise money for World Vision. Can you believe 20 teens not eating for that long? The kids decided to break their fast and come to the 5:30 pm service for Holy Communion before they ate. When I asked them what they worried about, they said jobs and health along with the list I had! Imagine that ... we have managed to transfer our adult worries to our kids!**

**The reality of worry leads to anxiety and depression. Medical personnel note that worry contributes to increased incidents of cancer, heart disease, addition, obesity and ulcers. I was shocked to read one report that linked worry with our increased ability to sleep. Researchers say that there are Over 43 million prescriptions for sleeping pills last year! That doesn't include over the counter medications! We worry so much now that we can't sleep!**

**Jesus speaks plainly to us in today's Gospel. His cure for worry is faith in God! He even goes further to challenge us to choose between one of the biggest sources of worry, money, and God! Conventional wisdom says, "If I only had enough money, I wouldn't have a worry!" This false! It's a myth. The reality is the more money we have the more we worry about keeping it! There is the government who wants to tax my money, the relatives that show up wanting a handout and the constant threat to our security around money. Jesus says money is not the answer; only faith in God is the answer.**

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**I'd like you to take a piece of paper money from your wallet or purse at this time. It doesn't matter what denomination it is ... and don't worry, I'm not going to ask you to part with it unless you want to! On one side is the picture of a president. Take a look at the bills, be it a \$1, \$5, \$10, \$20 ... and I hear they have \$50 and \$100 dollar bills too! Turn the bill over and look at the words above the word for the denomination. It reads, "In God We Trust."!!!**

**This is amazing! Our founders included in the paper money exchange those powerful words! It doesn't say trust in the Democrat, Republican or Independent political parties. It doesn't say trust in some institution or modern person. It says simply to trust God. What a remarkable reminder of where we are to place our trust!**

**Now take out a credit card. I don't care what kind. Look at both sides. Do we have any clue whom to trust? No! As a matter of fact, Americans have now accumulated record amounts of credit card debt! College students are graduating not only with loans to repay, but also with an average credit card debt of \$3,000! Our credit card culture tells us to "buy now, pay later!" The only thing we're not told is how much more it is going to cost us.**

**Conventional wisdom says, "He who has the most toys wins." Sadly, we have let the moneychangers convince us that life is about wealth, possessions and materialism. It harkens back to the Garden of Eden and the temptation of the serpent to Adam and Eve, "if you eat this, you will be like gods!" Our culture has done the same thing. We have been told money will give us everything we want. Money has become the idol ... we've forgotten about God.**

**Jesus' Sermon on the Mount tells us there is a different way, a life giving way. Jesus challenges us by saying, "Who do you serve? Wealth or God?" The serving of money leads to worry, which is caused by fear and becomes anxiety. This way leads to darkness and ultimate death. Worry accomplishes nothing! Jesus invites us to serve God. This is the way of faith and is grounded in trust and love. It leads us to light and life. Jesus points us towards trusting God, becoming what God wants and embracing Hope!**

**Jesus goes on to use the illustrations of the birds and flowers. He reminds us that nothing is greater than God's creation, and it's not something we can simply buy. Jesus goes on to tell us that we are worth more than the birds to God, that we will be clothed better than the flowers ... but we are required to give God our total allegiance.**

**We can't have it both ways ... we can't say to God that we'll give the Holy One 50% and place the rest of our trust in money. It's all or nothing with God. Jesus always implies that we will have to work, be responsible and understand that money is a tool ... not a god. We can't listen to this passage and decide to sit back and say to God, "Let me have it!" There is still work on our part to do. We must learn to be content with what we have, be generous**

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**with others, trust God and know that God knows what we need (and it's not about what we want). Worship of money and things is a DEAD END. If we want life, we must trust God.**

**As the Church, we are called to teach and live differently. Are we worried about money? Come join the Financial Peace University classes designed by Dave Ramsay. This is not a quick fix to money problems, but sound teaching with Christian emphasis on how to work towards being debt free, giving more and living like no one else so we can live better and happier lives! This is one way we can begin to embrace God and serve God.**

**Try to do away with the credit cards and use paper money. Each time you spend a bill, there is a reminder of where you serving is to rest ... in God. Read the back of each bill when you spend it ... "In God We Trust." Remember that Jesus spends more time talking about money than faith in the Gospels. Recognize the temptation to misplace our emphasis and focus in life.**

**Remember that as the people of God we are called to different values than the world. May we learn to serve and trust God, and to worry less and live! Amen.**