

Second Sunday before Lent  
Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> February 2017  
Matthew 6:25-34

Do not worry....that is hard, I suspect that we all worry about things to a greater or lesser extent. Does my hair look alright? Does this dress suit me? Is my job safe? What do others think of us? And of course much bigger issues.

I am a bit of a worrier, I worry when driving somewhere that I am not familiar with about getting lost. Just last week I had to drive to Southampton, my daughter was meeting me at the Mayflower Theatre - I started worrying a few days before the dreaded drive.

My nephew set my phone to direct me; it should have been easy - well it wasn't too bad. I took a wrong turning when in Southampton but the patient voice on the phone redirected me and I came along the road just by the theatre - I knew the car park was in the next road behind the theatre, no problem I thought.....but I couldn't turn right into it so I took the next right but that didn't help so I pulled into a taxi lay-by and called my daughter - who didn't answer her phone and thought I must sit and wait otherwise she would call me and then I wouldn't be able to answer and then in less than a minute she and the family suddenly appeared in front of me! Panic over and bless him my son-in-law took my car and parked it in the car park for me. As we took our seats in the theatre I did hope he had reversed into a space - but I needn't have worried he had!

Our gospel reading is a continuation of last week's reading of the bigger Sermon on the Mount. After healing lots of people Jesus withdrew from the crowds with his disciples.

The actual location for the Mount of Beatitudes is not certain but the present site has been commemorated for more than 1600 years and is on the north western shore of the Sea of Galilee not far from Capernaum. Jesus sat down with his disciples, when a Jewish Rabbi was teaching officially, he sat down.

This was not the ten minute sermon we are used to; it is likely Matthew put a number of these sermons together when he wrote his account.

Do not worry Jesus said about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink or about what you will wear. Look at the birds of the air.

Jesus had watched the birds flying high in the Galilean sky all his life.

And do not worry about clothing, consider the lilies of the field.

Jesus had watched the thousands of different kinds of flowers growing in the fertile Galilean soil - the word translated 'lily' here includes several different plants such as scarlet poppies, anemones, autumn crocus and had held his breath at their fragile beauty.

Where did its beauty come from.....

It didn't need to spend hours in front of the mirror or go shopping in the market place. It was just itself, God given, beautiful.

A reminder to us of the wonder of creation that we heard about in our reading from Genesis.

The reference about the lilies alive today and tomorrow thrown into the oven is that the Palestinian oven was made of clay, it was like a clay box set on bricks over the fire.

When you wanted to raise the temperature of it especially quickly some handfuls of dried grasses and wild flowers were flung inside the oven and set alight. The flowers had but one day of life and then set alight to help the woman to heat the oven when she was baking in a hurry.

When Jesus told his disciples not to worry about tomorrow, we must assume he led them by example. He wasn't always looking ahead anxiously; he seems to have had the skill of living totally in the present, giving attention to the present task, celebrating the goodness of God here and now.

So when Jesus tells us not to worry about what we will eat or what we will drink or what we will wear he isn't saying that they don't matter but don't put them first. Neither does he mean don't plant seeds or reap harvests or not work at weaving or spinning to make clothes, or work to earn money.

We must still make plans.

We must get our priorities right.

Strive first for the Kingdom of God....when I was sitting in my car last week it was when I stopped and just sat that the answer showed itself, I didn't need to worry.

We must stop, try to still our mind and let God do the rest. We often don't give God a chance our minds are so busy with our worries and thoughts. If we could just stop and be.....let God in.

This is where our prayer practice comes in especially contemplative prayer which has its base in the contemporary 'centring prayer'. In the practice (note its a practice not something we can ever perfect) we are making space for God, so that we can be in God, with God, allow God to speak to us.

So did you hear about the nun and the teacher? The teacher of contemplation came to the convent and was teaching the nuns to sit in silence and allow thoughts to drift out of their minds.

Imagine a river, the teacher said, and each thought is a boat in the river. Every time a thought or feeling enters your consciousness, see it as a boat give it a name (such as I'm hungry, or Poor Sister Clare, she is not well etc) and let it drift down the river, letting it go.

The return to the word (which you chose at the start of the practice, such as God is

love or whatever you like) and be still. Sister Mary-Catherine spoke up after the first period of practice. 'But this is dreadful! I shall never be able to do this well. My head is full of a thousand thoughts.' Without a seconds pause the teacher returned the sister's gaze and replied, 'How wonderful! A thousand times you chose God!'

We cannot help worrying but we can try to manage our worry, our anxiety, our panic. Mark Twain once said 'I'm an old man and I've know a great many troubles, but most of them never happened.'

Jesus calls his disciples that is you and me to put God first, both by giving priority to eternal issues and also by trusting our heavenly Father to meet our material needs here on earth. He will make sure we have things we need but that maybe not everything we might want.

There is an advert for the Nat West bank running at the moment and the strap line is 'We are what we do.' I think that works for us as individuals and as church.

So our challenge is to make some space to be still, to empty our minds to let things go and to truly know that peace which passes all understanding.

Amen.