

The First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham

Don't Worry

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Youth Sunday, March 15, 2015

Isaiah 51:1-8

Matthew 6: 25-34

Goodmorning :) For those of you who don't know me, I am Katie Schlafhauser, and this is my last official year with the youth program, so I was really excited and also really nervous when the opportunity came for me to present a sermon to you (gesture towards crowd). Bethany told me the topic for this sermon was worry, and I sort of felt my calling, because, I am innately a worrier.

I think a big part of my worry is centered on my fear of heights. I have always been afraid of heights. I stare at the small cliff looming before me and imagine a thousand scenarios that ultimately lead to my feet no longer being attached to the ground but more so flailing as I fall to the solid earth below me. I was never the adventurous child, because I was so scared for my safety. Whenever we stayed at hotels, my little sisters would always run to the balcony, and to me they seemed to be running into the hands of death. I would immediately pull them back and keep them from falling to the not so forgiving ground below.

I think the strongest instance of worry I ever felt was when my fear of heights was exponentially increased on our family trip out west. For those of you who have not been out to Colorado or Utah or Arizona, they do not like safe, flat ground there. No... They like cliffs, and arches and canyons and gorges and mountains. That's how they do it out west.

Anyways, we went to visit the Delicate Arch, and as my five year old sister stumbled dangerously close to the edge, I walked as far on the inside of the path as I could shouting for her to join me on the safe side. I now understand why child leashes are so popular.

Anyways, we stopped when we were in view of the arch, and we sat down for a picture. In hindsight, we probably could have gotten a postcard and I would have many fewer traumatic memories.

We were sitting on a rock, and there is about five feet of flat, sturdy ground to the ledge. This isn't a one-two foot baby drop, this is a "I can't tell if that's the ground" kind of a drop. Also, to make it better, there were no railings. The man taking our picture must not have had the smallest amount of fear because not only was he at the five foot mark of safe ground, he was leaning back to capture the whole scene. I think the picture captured my face perfectly. Horror. Pure horror. My face was red, hair was frizzy, and I can't really tell if I was smiling or just grinding my teeth really hard. Of course, my mother looked good in that picture, so it became our Christmas card photo that year. It was great for the most terrifying moment of my life to not only be captured forever in photograph, but also distributed to a variety of family and friends who could share in that raw fear and worry I had.

Worry. It can consume us. It can control us. It can define us.

Everyone, at some point, experiences worry. It is in our instinct to try to survive, and if we feel that something is threatening that survival, we panic and formulate solutions to get around the particular obstacle. I think the biggest factor promoting worry is the "what if" tendency we tend to take towards certain situations. What if there is pain? What if we go hungry? What if we don't have enough to provide for our families? What if there is loss? What if there is joy that we don't think we deserve?

From the youth perspective, there tends to be a lot of fear and uneasiness towards the future. What do we want to do with our lives? What if we pick the wrong path and can't change it? What if we aren't good enough?

Jesus says not to worry about where we will get our food or water. This seems like a great practice on the surface. It would be great to get my weekly salary and not immediately think about where each bit will be siphoned off to. This chunk goes to college. This chunk goes to my food for the week. This chunk goes to buying gas. This chunk goes to prom. Imagine if that conscious and unconscious worry could disappear. This is what God is promising through Jesus, and I want with every ounce of my being to achieve this nirvana of worry free peace.

It all sounds so easy, if we trust in God than we will be fed and clothed with the most holy of things, but then I stop and think. What about the millions of people in America alone that are going hungry every day. This isn't a once in a while struggle for them. This is an all-consuming worry that never goes away.

The fact of the matter is Jesus is asking us to stray away from our human instinct and find peace knowing that ultimately God will provide for us.

Provide us what?

This question keeps resonating through my mind. We are taught that we need food, water and shelter, yet so many go without those basic needs.

Is God breaking his promises, or is there more to this sermon than the surface level.

Throughout his sermon on the mount, Jesus presents basically a how-to-be-a-true-follower-of-God handbook, and this particular passage comes from that. It seems overwhelming seeing all of these unattainable characteristics laid out. Jesus tells us what true happiness is. He tells us how we are supposed to follow the Law of Moses to a tee, remove anger from our lives completely, remove thoughts of lust, and in essence, be a perfect person.

I am not an expert biblical theologian, but, to me, I see these as more guidelines than rules. Jesus knows it is impossible to master even one of these characteristics. All of them seems to be an unreachable goal. Jesus is showing us all that is possible when we are truly followers of God. When we follow God in the most pure and perfect sense of the word, we can achieve all of the things on the checklist of how to be a good follower.

Jesus is telling us not to worry. The birds don't spend their time worrying, and they live just like us. Won't God take more care of us because we are his children? After I read the passage a few times, I started to realize, hunger is only controlling if we let it poison the mind as well as body. Thirst, while deadly, will only truly bother us if we spend all of our time thinking about it. Sure we can only live three days without

it, but if we live those days not focused on the growing dehydration, then we have evaded worry's encompassing grasp.

If we give up on constantly obsessing over every curveball life throws us, we have achieved the peace God promises us. He promises that we will never go hungry if we trust in him. To truly trust in God and know that temporary hunger will be alleviated is to beat the hunger. You are no longer hungry if you stop focusing on it.

I know how mind controlling it is to go even one morning without breakfast. We sit in classes and work and contemplate all of the savory meals we could be having while our stomachs rumble on. If we go more than a few hours without drinking something, our throats become dry and our minds become filled with images of gently rushing streams or waterfalls or water bottles. But regardless of how hungry or thirsty or sad or worried we are in the moment, we always survive. We have all made it through varying degrees of hardships when we didn't know what the future held. We all made it through those.

Some of you may be going through current periods of time when the future has not revealed itself to you. Currently, I am still deciding where I want to go to college, what I want to do, and who I want to become. I am so worried I will make a wrong decision and end up somewhere that is not suited for me.

I think what Jesus wants us to take from this passage is that in order for God to keep his end of the bargain, we have to keep up our end. His promise is not a promise saying "Oh, as long as you exist, you will be taken care of". This is a two way promise. We have to trust God. We have to trust that these situations will unravel themselves, and they always do. We have to remember the number of successes on God's scoreboard and compare that with the hopefully infinitely small number of losses to worry.

Even if there was a time when we were careless and suffered for it, many times the pain of the moment fades away through time and we gain invaluable experience for it. Initially, I was so worried for the man taking that awful picture of me, and that awful picture of me being circulated between all of our family and friends. Now, when I look back on it, I laugh and know that the worry was self-created, and even though it was difficult in the moment and for time following it, I can look back with fondness at that memory and I have learned to next time, just take a selfie. No unnecessary fear in that scenario.

We have to remember that God loves us, and his love is pure. Sometimes human love can be selfish, but God's love is perfect. He wants what is best for us, and he has the means to make sure that happens. If we stop worrying about what tomorrow might bring, we can see that today has unanticipated joys of its own.

I think a nice way to wrap up this sermon is to offer a challenge. My challenge is for everyone to pick one thing, however small it might seem, and focus on it. Really analyze it and believe the part of you that says it will turn out fine. My theory is, if you can beat worry once, you know you can beat it again, as many times as you wish because you know you have done it before. Thank you very much for your time, and I hope everyone enjoys this warm weather:)