

There is a story in the gospel of Mark that tells us that the family of Jesus had to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind." They were saying that he was crazy. Well today, I think perhaps they are right.

Did you hear him in Matthew? "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life!" What planet are you from, Jesus? Clearly not ours. You clearly do not live my life. I have plenty of things to worry about. I've got kids. Will they finish school? Will they get a job that will pay the bills? And in this particular country the question that so many ask, will they have health insurance? And I worry not only about them but about me and my future. What's going to happen to the stock market? Will I have enough money for retirement? Will I even get to retire? What will happen to my health?

And what's more Jesus, I've got a church to worry about. There are more than 900 people in it. What will happen to them? Will I be available when I need to be available for them? What will I say when they lose someone special to them, especially when that someone is a child? What will we do with the sharp-tongued among them? How about the narrow minded, those who struggle to embrace change and different people? Will I come up with a sermon every week? Will the folks like the music? What will happen if they disagree with me? Will the bills be paid? Will we be able to have an intern? Will I memorize my lines for the play? Will my voice hold out so that I can sing and preach? Who will be the next family to fall into inactivity?

Jesus, I've got a world to worry about. What's going to happen in the Middle East? Egypt, Libya, Tunisia? And how about the price of gas? Is it going to be five bucks a gallon soon? And what about the labor

unrest in Wisconsin, New Jersey, Indiana, and Ohio? Will workers continue to have rights? And how will budgets be balanced? And what about the schools? How much more will their budgets be cut there? And who is going to lose jobs because of all of these cuts? And who really is going to suffer? And while I am at it, what person I know is going to be next to end up on the front page of the paper for an alleged 'crime? We, especially in this county, are arresting and jailing people at historically high rates. Who among us is next?

“Don't worry; be happy!” “Don't worry about it!” Come on, Jesus! What are you? Crazy? Well, if you are not crazy, then you are a bit idealistic. I think my brother in the faith Ulrich Luz is right in saying that these words of yours could only have been spoken or written “(by a single guy living a carefree life on the beach in sunny Galilee!” From all indications, you probably weren't married, Jesus. You didn't have kids, a stock portfolio, a 401-k plan, a house to make payments on, a boat to put gas in, credit card bills to payoff. What are you? Crazy? A hippie stuck in the sixties?

Slow down, Bill! Take a breath. First of all, make sure that you know what Jesus is really saying here. Let's look at the whole passage! “No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God **and** wealth.” The subject really is our hearts--where they are focused, what is at their center. The subject is our loyalty--where our hearts cling, what truly matters to us. The subject is greed. And Jesus is saying that it is impossible for us to serve both God and money and what money represents. He is not offering us some moral advice--you know, it's a bad idea to get wrapped up in money; you shouldn't do this. No, he is just stating the facts. We cannot give our

hearts to money and give our hearts to God at the same time. One will win over the other. It's kind of like having two women in your life. One will get your heart over the other. It's just the facts, ma'am, just the facts!

And if you do choose to serve money, Jesus seems to be implying, you will know lots of anxiety and worry. Serving money brings anxiety. When money and what it represents and what it can buy is at the center of your life, your life will be filled with worry. How do I protect it? How can I get more? How can I make sure that my life is secure? Do I have enough life insurance? How do I make certain that the market treats me well? How do I position myself so that I can be the one who gets the goods from the inheritance from grandpa? If money and possessions are at the center of my life I will have to struggle to figure out what I will do with them all the money and with the possessions. How much should I diversify? Should I build a bigger house or rent a storage space for all my stuff? How will I protect my stuff so that no one abuses it? How will I keep the scratches off the car, the carpet forever clean, the walls unmarred? Whew! It's hard work when we serve mammon, money and stuff. It's anxiety producing.

“Don't worry about it!” Serve God, not stuff. Don't worry about what you will eat, what you will drink, what you will wear. Don't worry about your status before others! Life is much more than status. Life is much more than what people think, what they think about you. Life is much deeper. Life in God is much richer. Think about the birds in the air. They don't seem to get worked up. They don't seem always to be after more. Yet God gives them what they need. And you are worth a whole lot more to God than they are. If God pays attention to the sparrows, don't you think that you are included in his care. And

consider the flowers in the field. They just shine forth their beauty, without needing to get all anxious about it. They are beautiful in and of themselves. Old rich Solomon with all of his fancy clothes couldn't match their beauty. **You** are beautiful in and of yourself. And so why are you getting so anxious about how you appear to others?

I've got seven or eight friends who show up in my yard most 'nights. They really are beautiful. Ya, I know. They eat all the birdfeed, do their number on our bushes and plants. But still they are stunning. They are so swift and graceful. They do seem a little fearful when they spot me. They probably think I am one of those persons like Jeff Legard/Jeff Lucht who carry those long guns. But still they seem carefree. And they seem to be taken care of *even* in the midst of winter.

Here's the deal. In the realm of God, life is not about taking, but about receiving. In the realm of God, life is about what is given, not what is grasped, manufactured, achieved. And our God gives abundantly. There is no scarcity in the realm of God. There is abundance. There is plenty. There is more than enough. More than enough love. More than enough forgiveness. More than enough grace. More than enough of what our lives truly need. You grasp. You hold on. You fight with your relatives. You resent your brother or your sister. You get uptight about your possessions. You spend your life collecting and moving stuff because you think there is not enough. But in the realm of God there is more than enough. The heavens, the earth, the mountains bear witness to the abundance of God. God is abundant in compassion. God is like, as Isaiah says, a woman who will never forsake her nursing child. Glance at the cross. As Jesus dies on the cross we experience God's compassion in its fullness—a compassion that is big enough for suffering of the whole world.

So ... *don~t worry about it*. Oh, it's not that there aren't things that we need to put effort into. It's not as if we cannot have concerns or worries. It's not as if food and clothing and houses and stock portfolios don't matter. We've got to deal with that stuff. But we who follow Jesus deal with it in light of the reign of God, in light of the abundance of God, in light of the compassion of God. There's more than enough of that compassion to go around. So seek first the abundance of God and all that comes with that abundance. The other stuff will fall in its place. That's the craziness that Jesus invites into.