

“What do you mean, don’t worry?”

May 25, 2008

Text: Psalm 131, Matthew 6:24-34

I.

On this Memorial Day weekend, curiously enough, the recommended *Lectionary* reading is from Jesus’ **Sermon on the Mount** ... the part about not worrying. As many of you may remember, the *Lectionary* is a three-year cycle of suggested scripture readings. The idea is that if you stick to the *Lectionary*, over this three year period, you will cover most of the Bible.

For the most part, it’s a good discipline. However, I was surprised to find this as the main reading (the one in **bold** print) for Memorial Day weekend.

Don’t worry, says Jesus ... *about your life* ... *about the basic necessities—food, drink, clothing* ... whatever it is. ***Don’t worry*** ... *place your trust in God* ... *over time, things will work out*.

To be sure, these words of Jesus are sound advice. No doubt, many of us worry too much ... and perhaps even about the wrong things. It’s human to worry.

II.

But on this Memorial Day weekend, as we take pause to remember the families of our women and men in uniform—in the military—we can only imagine the probable reaction of these families to Jesus’ words about worrying:

What do you mean, don’t worry?

Don’t they have a point? How can the families of our men and women deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan not worry?

With the death toll mounting ... every week some utterly disheartening account of an explosion, or a fire fight, or an assault ... whatever it is; and innocent, random people dying. ***What do you mean, don’t worry?***

No matter how well prepared we are ... no matter how safe and careful we seek to be, all the time, stuff happens; and again, so many times it’s just random happenings.

- Bombs going off that could not have been predicted ...
- Other acts of violence that could not have been foreseen.

The problem with the war on terror is that there is so much that is unpredictable. The enemy is often unidentifiable and elusive. It's not like we're fighting an identifiable enemy in an identifiable location. Terrorists and others seeking to do us harm can come from anywhere at almost any time.

For sure, part of what makes the *war on terror* so difficult and frustrating is precisely its unpredictable nature.

And again, for the parents and family of our military, to say nothing of the actual military personnel themselves: ***What do you mean, don't worry?***

III.

On this Memorial Day weekend, with wrenching hearts and aching souls, we remember the dead and the wounded in Iraq, Afghanistan and other places. We remember that each fallen soldier has a name and a very real *life story* to tell. ***We remember.***

Edmund Lee Randle, Jr. was pictured on the front page of the Miami Herald this morning. At 24 years of age, he died in Iraq back in 2004. Every Memorial Day since then his family mourn his death, taking pause, with deep sorrow in their spirit, to remember

And so, we remember the families of those who have fallen and all that they have endured.

- The seemingly endless nights of worry and wonder and then, sometimes sadly, the crushed hopes and dreams.
- And we remember, also, the wounded and those who have come home with irreversibly scarred bodies and minds.
- We remember ... and we ache on their behalf ...

And for these wounded, returning home ... trying to find some measure of healing and wholeness ... and then, a path and a direction to move on with their lives.

Of course, the families of our military worry! How could they not?

We worry when we're uncertain and anxious about final results ... and about the process leading to these results. We worry when we feel powerless, with virtually no control over possible events fraught with very real and serious danger.

I often wonder how these military families cope. How do they work their way through the unfolding days, weeks, and months? At some point, it would seem, they would have to *let go* ... and somehow trust that things will work out? Not an easy thing to do.

Letting go of fear and moving on in trust and hope can be a tricky maneuver to work out in one's own mind and spirit. How do we go about trusting God in all of this? And not just in wartime, but at the foot of any potential danger. How do we trust that God will somehow work it all out?

What do you mean, don't worry?

IV.

It can all be more than a little complicated and confusing can't it?

Does God control the outcome of events ... in everything ... to the point where God somehow determines who lives and who dies? And do we pray fervently, therefore, because we want so much for God to protect our cherished loved ones, believing that God has it within God's power to do so ... amidst the evil that at times surrounds us and the random accidents that come our way?

Many of us, at times, may like to think that God is somehow in charge in this way—irrespective of random happenings ... like the deadly cyclone that struck Burma a couple of weeks back ... and the monstrous earthquake that has left more than 60,000 dead in China.

With natural disasters, about which there is so much mystery ... in wartime with actual and potential violence all about ... in the daily living out of our lives with automobile travel and air travel ... with health situations of all stripes ... **CHECK IT OUT: *is God in some way orchestrating all of this?***

The Bible does not teach that, no matter what, we will always be safe and well in our earthly life. Clearly, the Bible knows. Life and creation don't work that way.

What the Bible knows is that both the universe and we human beings are created in freedom; which means, we make choices ... all the time, every moment. And these choices have consequences, some good and some bad.

At the point of our decision making, God gives us the freedom to choose ... just as the universe, too, makes free choices in its evolving and unfolding.

The promises and reassurances of the Bible do not work against us being free and living out our lives in a free manner. Every day, we make choices; and sometimes even our best choices and decisions don't work out and bring unforeseen adverse results.

We see this in relationships, in business ventures and career choices, and in health-related decisions. Sometimes we make good, sound choices; sometimes we don't.

V.

Even at our best, there's risk involved. Life is risky. And because it IS risky, and because we can't absolutely predict consequences, and because there IS evil in the world, all we can do as human beings and as people of faith is give ourselves to God and to the Spirit in the high hope that, at the end of the day, we'll be okay ... and that some ultimate good will be realized.

Our **worries**, our **fears** and **trepidations** can never be totally eliminated. However, they can be transcended. We can rise above them, giving ourselves to God and to the Spirit in trust.

But still, it's human to worry along the way. To be in the midst of a storm and not be aware that it's storming is not real. It's to be in denial. There are things—dangers, fears ... whatever—that, to some extent, we can't help but worry about.

What do you mean, don't worry? Hey, we're human! We can't help it. It's an outpouring of our deep yearning and longing to be united with our family ... with everyone together, healthy and well. It's in our DNA; we're made this way.

VI.

However, our faith CAN calm the worries ... and it CAN reassure us of the essential goodness of life and of the ultimate power of God's undying love.

At this point, I don't know where to go here but to Romans 8. Whenever we're searching our hearts and trying to sort out the ultimate meaning of our lives, Romans 8 seems to call us.

I refer, of course, to the Apostle Paul's powerful faith affirmation in his letter to the church at Rome ... words which are read at every funeral and memorial service. These last verses of Romans 8 are the hill to die on for all Christians.

For who can separate us from the love of God? Can it be hardship or distress, or persecution or danger or death?

*No, in all these things we have complete victory through him who loved us ... for **NOTHING** can separate us from God's love ... neither death nor life ... neither the present or the future ... neither the world above or the world below ... **there is nothing is all of creation that can ever separate us from God's love.***

And how do we know that? Because of the Easter experience. Because of how Jesus, who had been crucified, dead and buried, was somehow alive. He was alive in spirit to the disciples and to his most ardent followers.

And those who experienced his presence ... whatever it was, however it was, were changed.

Their lives were changed; they could never be the same again. The resurrection power that filled their hearts and spirits and minds forever changed them.

Translation (what does it all mean?): it means that, although we're all going to physically die someday, still, as people of faith, we are never separate from God. Again, ***nothing can separate us from God's love.***

VII.

And so ...

- on the other side of all our worries, our anxieties and fears ...
- on the other side of all that is profoundly human in our daily struggles, our worries give way to the powerful affirmation that God is our eternal companion that no power on earth can overcome.

With this faith-affirmation in our spirit, we can take greater comfort, now, in Jesus' words ...

Don't worry ... and stop striving for the wrong things. Keep the BIG PICTURE of your lives in mind. Strive first for the kingdom of God.

Let your heart and soul be calmed, says the Psalmist. For there is nothing in all of creation that can ever separate you from God's love.

All praise be unto God! Amen!

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