

A Sermon for DaySpring

“Like a Child at the Table”

By Chris Fillingham
Matthew 6:24-34; Psalm 131
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It takes a lot of courage to be a human these days. It seems like another disaster is always lurking around the corner. Just this decade we've had *9-11, a tsunami in Indonesia, Katrina, wild fires, devastation in Myanmar, an earthquake in China, not to mention thousands of people losing their homes to foreclosure* while the economy teeters on the brink of a recession... just to name a few.

It's a bit overwhelming when you think about. In fact I'd advise you to not think about it all at once because you might find yourself hopelessly overwhelmed.

After awhile you might begin to think there are snakes under your bed and monsters in your closets, and we certainly don't need that kind of hysteria. Besides, we may just find ourselves thinking that every day that brings something new is just disastrous... even catastrophic. So it's probably better if you don't dwell on it too much.

Because things do keep changing and change can be a bit disorienting. Our story keeps moving forward... the story of each of our lives and the great story that we are all a part of, keeps moving forward. We turn the page and find ourselves stepping past what we've known into the unknown. So now we're living in a world full of *post-isms*. We're post-modern, post-enlightenment, post-Christendom.

Depending on where you are in your life journey you may be post-innocence, or post-independence and now you have a child to take care of.

Or an empty-nester or retired and now without your children or job to give you definition.

Or maybe you're post-idealism and you realize that you're living the ordinary American Christian life like everyone else you know.

And so now what? Our lives keep pulling us forward to unexpected places and sometimes we're not sure what to do with the time we've been placed in and that can be a bit scary. So, it takes a lot of courage to be human these days.

But we're not the first to feel this way. There was a large crowd and a handful of close disciples that followed Jesus to a mountainside one day. And these were people who knew about change. These were the children of Abraham. They were post-Exodus, post-Davidic Kingdom, post-Assyria, post-Babylon, post-Persia trying to figure out how to survive as the people of God under Roman rule.

These people had followed Jesus there for all sorts of reasons. Some were there because he told them to leave their jobs, their fishing nets, and follow him. Some were there because they

had heard that this guy could heal them or heal their daughter. Most were there because it seemed exciting to hear this guy talk about the Kingdom of God.

Jesus sits down and asks the crowd to sit down and he begins to teach them. This wasn't the easiest sermon to remember. There weren't three clear points that all began with the same letter. There wasn't any talk about Rome and the evil empire (which everyone always likes to hear). There wasn't even a nice story line to follow.

Instead Jesus starts talking about those who are blessed, about being salt and light, loving your enemies, and then he starts talking about money. Now it's pretty clear that Jesus hadn't had any good classes on leadership. If you want to build a following it's never good to dump so much on people all at once... and you certainly don't want to start talking about their money in your first major sermon.

People always get uncomfortable and skeptical when you start talking about their money. In fact I'm getting a little nervous right now just saying the word *money* from the pulpit!

But Jesus didn't shy away from touchy topics. He talked about lust, and hatred, and food, and money, and judging, and obedience. And right smack in the middle of all that Jesus starts talking about *worry*.

Which seems a little strange at first. Worry doesn't seem like it should make this list here. We expect Jesus to be talking about lust, and money, and judging. But worry?

But here it is. Right in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells that a requirement of being his disciple is to not worry.

Perhaps that's because He knows that just as much as lust and hatred and judging, worry can grow like a cancer inside of you and inside of any community of people.

Jesus tells us to not worry because God takes care of the birds of the air and He clothes the flowers of the field, so certainly God will take care of us. Which sounds good and all until you start thinking about how many birds die each year or what our flowers look like in August.

Jesus seems to be saying, don't worry, because God will take care of his own. If you're a Christian then God will keep you from harm. Which also sounds good, and maybe that is your experience.

But it doesn't make a whole lot of sense when we start thinking about those that God seems to have forgotten... like those starving to death across the world or across town, and the innocent dying in Myanmar and China... or the hard working firefighters who died in 9-11 or the little girl living in a homeless shelter because her family lost their home.

So, I'd say we should worry, at least a little. I think if I were there I'd like to go up and ask Jesus about this worry stuff. After making some dumb joke that wasn't really funny, I'd tell Jesus that worrying has served me well.

I'd admit to him that my mom used to tell me that I was a negative vampire and I sucked the energy right out of everything, but I'd also remind him that worrying has helped me make some very calculated decisions that have helped me get ahead and protect myself. Worrying has even helped me protect my family.

I may even ask him, *Jesus, don't you think protecting and caring for my family is just being a good steward of what you've given me?* (I'd use the word *steward* because it would bolster my argument when talking with Jesus.)

Now, I don't know what he would say to all this. The scriptures don't record anyone testing him on his teachings about *worry*. He may just say something very simple like, *If you want to be my disciple, then you have to stop worrying.*

But the problem is, I'm not always sure how to continue to care for others or care for the world or for those in need and to stop worrying at the same time. I'm a pretty empathetic person and sometimes the line between compassion and worry can be a bit fuzzy for me.

This is a hard teaching of Jesus. It's hard for us and I imagine it was hard for the disciples and the crowd. Especially when he throws out his indictment of all those worriers out there: *O you of little faith*, he said to them.

That phrase probably sounds familiar to most of you. This is the *first of five times Jesus says these words* to his closest disciples in the Gospel of Matthew:

When the storm rages in the sea, they are close to drowning, and in fear they wake up Jesus. He says to them, *O you of little faith.*

When Peter bravely steps out of the boat and begins to walk on water toward Jesus, but then sees the waves and begins to sink, Jesus says to him, *O you of little faith.*

And he goes on... saying to them and saying to us, *O you of little faith.*

When your worries keep you up at night,

When your anxieties grip your chest,

When your mind keeps racing to try and figure out all the details of your life,

He says to you and to me, *O you of little faith. Seek first the Kingdom of God and all these things will be added unto you.*

So, this is a hard teaching. It's not like worry is a switch that can just be turned off. I wonder if I had been in that crowd and asked Jesus how I was suppose to stop worrying if he would have told me to go meditate on Psalm 131 for awhile... for a few weeks or months or even longer.

Jesus probably knew this psalm fairly well because it was a psalm of Ascent. It was sung by those making their pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The people of God who were on their way to meet with God would sing these words. Listen to them again:

*O Lord, my heart is not lifted up,
my eyes are not raised too high;
I do not occupy myself with things too great*

*or things too wonderful for me.
But I have calmed myself
and quieted my soul,
Like a weaned child with its mother;
my soul is like the weaned child within me.
O Israel, hope in the Lord
from this time forth and forevermore.*

I wonder if Jesus would tell us to meditate on this psalm because he knows that we're all pilgrims on a journey... He's telling us that somehow letting go of our worry, calming and quieting our soul, is connected to *seeking the Kingdom of God*.

Jesus knows the kind of courage it takes to be a human being... especially to be a person seeking the Kingdom of God. And this pilgrim's psalm gives us a picture of one who has humbled their ambitions, who has calmed and quieted their soul like a weaned child with its mother... like a weaned child with its mother.

That's such a poignant picture, isn't it? Before a child is weaned, you can see the anxiety in their eyes every time they're hungry. Even as mom gets ready to feed them, they start grasping for her, worried and crying because when a baby wants to be fed, she wants to be fed now! There's no perspective, no security, no trust that she will be fed.

But once she is weaned, she's learned that mom and dad aren't going to let her go hungry. She's learning to wait... to be patient. She knows that her mother will take care of her. So there's no need to be frantic when the waves of the sea begins to churn. There is a learned stillness that comes from being fed over and over. She learns to trust...

And once you know this place of trust and surrender, once you've learned to calm and quiet your soul... then you know to sing with the other pilgrims on the journey...

O Israel, hope in the Lord, from this time forth and forevermore.

Yes. Jesus knows the kind of courage it takes to be a human being. He wants us to come back to him over and over and over to be fed at his table until we learn to calm and quiet our souls.

So, as we come to the table this morning, he offers us the bread and cup, his flesh and blood, again. He asks us to stop worrying and to seek first his kingdom. So, we come to this table like pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem, on their way to be with God.

We come bringing our worries and anxieties, we come bringing our successes and failures, we come with however much or little we have to offer. But we come as people seeking the Kingdom of God to eat from the bread of Life... and to drink from the cup of our Salvation.

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