

# No Worries

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## Matthew 6:24-34

“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. Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you – you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.”

A colleague of mine, a historian of religion in America, now retired, has a collection of black suits in his closet. It makes things easier, he says. He gets up in the morning, puts on his white dress shirt, and reaches into his

closet for a black suit. The only variation from day to day is his tie, which in his case is a bow tie. It's one way to avoid the daily anxiety about what to wear.

My situation on Sunday mornings is not quite so stark. The sartorial choices typically boil down to black, grey, and charcoal – or some variation thereof.

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear,” Jesus says. “Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”

He continues: “And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.”

**N**ot to worry? How can Jesus be serious about this? There's a lot to worry about in this life. The economy. Is my job secure? Will my kids ever find jobs? What about retirement? Will I have enough to retire? Health care. Too much snow. Not enough rain.

And even that misses the big picture. Al-Qaeda. Big government. Liberals. The Tea Party. Global warming. I suspect I'm not the only person here today who remembers the Civil Defense drills of the 1950s. We were expected to dive beneath our school desks when the alarm sounded – as though a school desk would somehow spare us from a nuclear attack. My wife grew up with a bomb shelter in her parents' suburban home. I used to worry about Communists when I walked the three miles to swimming practice before dawn on winter mornings. The big, black limousine would pull up alongside me, I feared, the back door would fling open, and a disembodied voice would beckon, “Get in zee car.”

Catharine used to worry about the Shining Path, the Maoist organization in Peru. Presumably, once they finished their terrorism in the Andes, they had their sights set on Pittsburgh.

There's a lot to worry about in this life. And if you forget that, even for a moment, turn on the television for a few reminders. Body odor. Bad breath. Your car insurance.

But Jesus tells us not to worry. It's not that life is easy or simple. "Today's trouble is enough for today," Jesus says. He acknowledges that we must attend to such mundane concerns as food and shelter and clothing, noting that "your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things."

Rather, it's a matter of disposition and priorities, according to today's Gospel: "strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

**S**o where do our priorities lie? Are we fixated, perhaps understandably these days, on survival, on getting by? Jesus invites us to surrender those concerns and focus on a higher purpose: "strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

And here I think it's worth circling back to the beginning of the reading. "No one can serve two masters," Jesus says, "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." Jesus is not inveighing here against money; that's not the point of his declaration about serving God and wealth. He's saying that wealth doesn't make for a very good master. The Greek word translated as "master" here is *kurios*, which means "lord." If we allow money and wealth to be our lord, our priorities will be acquisitiveness and avarice. If, on the other hand, we allow God to be our lord, our priorities will be the priorities of the kingdom: the pursuit of justice and kindness and mercy.

Jesus invites us to set aside our worries lest we become enslaved to them, allow them to become our master. Wealth and money and even survival, after all, are transitory concerns in the larger context of the kingdom of God.

No worries, Jesus says. You're in good hands. I'll take care of the small stuff.  
You attend to the larger task of building the kingdom of God.

Eighth Sunday after the Epiphany

February 27, 2011

Christ Church

Middle Haddam, Connecticut