

Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary,  
pure and holy, tried and true;  
with thanksgiving,  
I'll be a living sanctuary for You.

Matthew 6:25-34

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---of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, "What will we eat?" "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.

Mark 6:30-34

The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

"Sanctuary"

Jesus said to them, "Come with me by yourself to a quiet place and get some rest."

Mark 6:31b

Sanctuary: 'A sacred place, the holiest part of the temple, the part of the chancel containing the altar.' (Webster) For the disciples, it was the boat. For us, it is upstairs at 29 Howard Street, West Bridgewater. Sanctuary: 'A place of refuge, protection, safety'. (Webster). It is the meditative place of prayer in which we are emptied of ourselves and filled with the Real Presence of the Living God.

In his book, *'From Whom No Secrets Are Hid; Introducing the Psalms'*, Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann gets us thinking about a spiritual malady, that if we brushed it from the halls of our minds, would allow us to sleep better at night. He wrote: 'Our closely held world is a world of anxiety that is rooted in scarcity. It is a world that is worried about running out, not having enough, not having done enough, not having been enough, not measuring up, not being safe or valued or esteemed. Just now our anxiety is heightened, as we are variously urged to live on Orange Alert. I think, moreover, that it is part of the policy and intention of the present powers to keep us on Orange Alert, because those deep in anxiety are more likely to conform. Beyond the present "alert," the advertizing liturgies of capitalism on TV constantly remind us that we have not yet arrived, that we do not yet have the right product that will make us safe, prosperous, and happy. The unspoken message is that we are currently unsafe, un-prosperous and unhappy, and we will continue to be so until we 'buy in.'" It is surely the case that anxiety is to some extent the inescapable human condition, but to dub ours as "the age of anxiety" is to acknowledge that ours is acutely so, and that to some extent that acute anxiety is ideologically produced in an intentional way. As a result, we travel with a constant eye on scarcity, and consequently, we ration. We ration health care and food. But we also ration grace, limiting those who may have access to our

“goodies”, whether immigrants who want a safe home, or women who want to be ordained, or gays who want to be married. We worry that if the goodies and power are shared more widely, there will not be as much for us.’

E. Stanley Jones, a great missionary and author in the last century, famously declared, “Worry is atheism.” Worry implies there is no God, or at least not a God who cares or a God who can act. Worry says, “It is all up to me.” Worry sings, “I’ve got the whole world in my hands.” It is the form of atheism that frets, “If I don’t do it, it’s not going to happen.” (from “Jesus is the Question: The 307 questions Jesus asked and the 3 He Answered ‘ by Martin Copenhaver, p. 50) Living without God on Orange Alert is nothing new. So in Jesus’ day when Jews gathered in the temple in worship of YAHWEH they sought relief from their worries by singing psalms that contradicted their world of anxiety by imagining a counter-world presided over by the trustful fidelity and transformative attentiveness of God. I can imagine that Psalm 23 gave as much sanctuary peace to congregants back then as it does for us now. “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want, he maketh me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside still water, he restoreth my soul.” And I can imagine that a defying of the threat and an adamant refusal to participate in the anxiety that is all around kicked in as soon the word “though” flowed from their lips as it does from ours now. ‘Even though’ I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. Thou anointest my head with oil. My cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

In Jesus’ extended teaching on worry from our gospel lesson from today, we find him using the psalmist’s way of dissipating scarcity anxiety while building faith in Israel’s shepherding God. After his opener, ‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life’ fell on deaf ears, in quick succession he asked five rhetorical questions. “Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?” “Are you not of more value than the birds

of the air?” Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?” “And why do you worry about clothing?” “If God so clothed 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?” Rhetorical questions are asked to produce an effect rather than summon an answer. This series effectively challenged the validity of their unchallenged, unrecognized worldly worries and lack of faith. Then before the disciples could start worrying about the fact that they had not worried about these things before--- Jesus painted this evocative sanctuary scene: ‘Consider the lilies. Look at the wildflowers. Take a lesson from them. No gardener planted them. No one watered them. No one fretted over them. Yet God cared for them and supplied all that was needed. And look at them now, sprinkled across the field, dancing in the wind. Beautiful. Contented. Consider the lilies’. Then comes the question of faith.



Since God cares for them so magnificently, don’t you think you can trust God to take care of you? “Lovely lilies,” said Martin Luther, “how you rebuke our foolish nervousness.” (ibid) And how gladly we now sing: ‘Seek ye first the kingdom of God and God’s righteousness, and all these things will be given unto you, Alleluia, Alleluia. ‘