

Sunday 19 February 2017

2nd Sunday before Lent, St Andrew's, Cobham

Genesis 1.1-2.3; Romans 8.18-25; Matthew 6.25-end.

Worry and God: Two Balloons in a Box.

Was it Oscar Wilde who said that some people don't know how strong temptation is because they never try and resist it? It sounds like something he would have said.

I sometimes think that we don't know just how hard Jesus' commands are until we try to keep them. Our Lord's teachings often seem to go against every instinct we possess. Give away your money. Love those who hate you. Forgive those who do you wrong. Turn the other cheek.

And in our reading today, we have another impossibly hard command.

'Do not worry.'

Now, I'm willing to bet that most of us here today break that command every single day of our lives. Perhaps every hour of our lives. I know I do.

We have big worries – money, health, our children.

And little worries – meeting deadlines, looking foolish, that sound your car has started making.

Worry. Why do we do it? And why does Jesus make so much of it? Is it really so bad? And how are we meant to stop doing it, when it is as natural to us as breathing? Surely it is impossible not to worry.

Now, I'm not going to spend much time on *why* we worry. Probably at the root of every worry is a deep fear. Fear of suffering. Fear of failure. Fear of being alone. Fear of death.

But I don't want to dwell on the 'why' of worry this morning, largely because in our reading from Matthew, Jesus himself doesn't dwell on it. He simply commands us: *'Do not do it'*.

Now, if Jesus had left it at that, he would have left us with a sense of complete hopelessness of ever being able keep the command.

But He doesn't do that, of course, because He never gives us a command we can't keep, and He never asks us to do anything He doesn't do. Can you imagine Jesus worrying? Try and picture Jesus fretting or anxious or depressed about what might happen tomorrow. It's simply not possible, is it? Worrying is one of the least Christ-like things we can think of. And we are meant to be like Him.

So what is the key to keeping his command not to worry?

Jesus himself tells us:

'Seek first [the Father's] kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.' [Matthew 6.33].

In other words, put God first in your life and everything else will fall into place. This is what Jesus did, to perfection. The central thing in His life was His relationship with the Father, and everything fell into place around that. Jesus promises that the same applies to us. If we put God first, then God, who knows what we need and who loves us, will ensure that we have what we need. It doesn't mean that we won't sometimes suffer, but it does mean that God will give us what we need to endure it.

In order to illustrate this relationship between worry and God, I've tried to come up with an image that might be helpful.

Picture two balloons in a box. When one of the balloons is fully inflated, there is no room for the other one.

Now use one balloon to represent the worries in your life. Money? Health? Your children's wellbeing? Big worry or small, it doesn't matter. Perhaps in your mind's eye you could write the name of your worry on it.

Now think of the other balloon. This one represents God.

Now, there is something peculiar about these two balloons. Normally, a balloon only inflates if we put air into it. *That is not the case with the worry balloon.* The worry balloon grows bigger almost without us doing anything, as if the air of this world simply seeps into it by osmosis. That is the way of the world, and Jesus warns us about that many times. Remember what he said about how the cares of this world spring up and take over like weeds in a garden. In my example, the cares of this world are like air expanding a balloon.

The God balloon is different. Unfortunately, it only expands if you make an effort to put air into it.

Now compare your worry balloon with your God balloon. Which one is taking up more space in the box?

If the worry balloon is bigger, then urgent action is needed. What are you to do? Simply trying to stop worrying by a mental effort won't help to deflate the worry balloon. You need to do something else. You need to get air into the God balloon.

How do we do that?

Well, every time we move our focus from our worries to God, the God balloon grows a bit bigger and forces some of the air out of the worry balloon. When we pray, we inflate the balloon a little more. When we read the Scriptures, or try to follow Jesus' example, we inflate the balloon even more. Every time we thank God for something, up goes the God balloon. Every time we consciously place our trust in God's love, and abandon control to Him, the God balloon gets a great big injection of air.

As we do this, the worry balloon has more and more air forced out of it until it finally shrivels away.

This is the only way we can keep impossible commands like 'Do not worry' – by bringing God more and more to the forefront of our lives, so that His world becomes larger and more real to us, and our anxious, fear-driven world becomes the unreal, unimportant one.

Our work in this life is not to deflate the worry balloon, but to inflate the God balloon.

In closing, just a note of warning.

I asked earlier why Jesus makes so much of worry. Well, it's because the balloons in the box work both ways. The bigger the worry balloon is, the smaller the God balloon will be. If we are not very, very careful, worry will eliminate God from our lives, without us even noticing. Worry might seem like an unimportant disobedience for a Christian, just a little sin. That is wrong. The grave danger with worry is that there simply isn't room in the box for two balloons. In our lives, there can be only one or the other – worry or God.

And that is the only thing we should worry about.

Amen