

Christ Church + Washington Parish
The Rev. Cara Spaccarelli
November 22, 2018, Thanksgiving Day
Matthew 6:25-33

Worry may be the great equalizer. We all worry. Young/old. Men/women. Rich/poor.

Regardless of ethnicity. Regardless of education level. Everyone worries. Some have more to worry about than others, but it's been my experience that that doesn't matter. Worry has very little to do with objective facts. Worry wonders - what should I do? What is she thinking? will it all fall apart? Will I be alone? Will he be okay? Worry looks to the future, but not in a goal-oriented strategic way; because, as Jesus reminds us, worry is completely ineffective. "Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?" "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today." Which does seem to provide a loophole for worrying about today's troubles, and if we could keep ourselves just to today's troubles, I think we would be doing pretty well.

Acceptance of the futility of worry is a poor antidote to it. It also tends to be a poor response to other people's worry. Don't Worry Be Happy may have been the first acapella song to make it to number one on the Billboard charts, but it isn't meditative music that calms the anxious. Jesus offers a meditative technique here to support his teaching. Look for things to be grateful for in the present. The lilies of the field, the birds of the air, choose something, choose a few things. Look at their simplicity, their beauty, the way they are what they are as God created them and it is good.

Now if we are looking at a field in the path of the California wildfires, the lilies are not okay. But there is always a metaphorical fire going on somewhere, if the fire is a concern in your today, by all means worry about it, but if it is not, change your focus.

Gratitude changes the focus. Gratitude is grounded in the present and the past, resisting worry's pull to the future. Jesuit theologian Anthony de Mello said, "You sanctify whatever you are grateful for." So gratitude unveils God's blessings in our lives. It helps us to see the blessing of the holy right in front of us. The blessings pushes aside the worry; the worry continues to exist but it becomes a small side dish in the feast of blessing that is creation.

Last Saturday I struggled to see the blessing in the feast before me. My husband and sons returned from Goodwill with this monkey [bring it out]. Where will it go? I worried. I noticed white flakes in my children's hair – thankfully not lice, but clearly the monkey is shedding something on them as they wrestle with it and I continue to pick white flecks out of my boys' hair every day for the last week. But most importantly, I worry how I will sneak it out of the house in a few months – it is so much larger than the many toys that have gone before it that I have successfully let go of once my children lose interest with them rarely the wiser.

Yet amidst my worry there were my boys in front of me, filled with great joy. At first I thought it was the joy of successfully conspiring to frustrate me, and that was part of it, but they also love this rainbow monkey. They are all laughter when they play with it. They cuddle with it as they read a book. As I watch them relish it as only children can, I am grateful. They are eight and ten

and I know the years are not far away where childhood laughter and joy will become not so easy to buy. I am grateful for the spirit of joy in my home.

Gratitude can be seen (point to monkey). Before it was a noun, Thanksgiving was a verb. It is something people of faith have always done – we give thanks. Prayers to God from the beginning always includes words of thanks and they often include an act of thanks. In earlier times it was expressed in an offering of sacrifice in the temple; today it may be expressed in the giving of one's time or resources to the needs of others. Like to the many of you who shopped for Thanksgiving baskets for our Capitol Hill Group Ministry families, or for those of you who volunteer your time regularly, or for those who, seeing the devastation of the California wildfire have given of your abundance to those who have lost everything. In thanksgiving for what we have, we act. Gratitude in our heart has to come out of us – it is not enough to feel it. It has to be acted upon to foster the peace of heart that Jesus describes in Matthew today.

A desert father once said:

If you have a chest full of oranges, and leave it for a time,
the fruit will rot inside of it.

It is the same with the thoughts in our heart.

If we do not carry them out by physical action,
after a while they will spoil and turn bad.

It's only been a week since the rainbow monkey has been in our home. It hasn't grown on me. But my gratitude for the joy in my home has helped me accept that it has a place in my home. "You sanctify whatever you are grateful for." So this monkey is now holy. As you take time today to set aside the worries of tomorrow and be grateful for the blessings of today, may you see the lilies, the birds, the oversized stuffed monkeys of your life as a sign of the spirit of God in your life and your appreciation of them be an expression of your gratitude to God.