

Almost 2000 years have passed since anything we read from the Holy Scripture today was written. Everything has changed and nothing has changed since then.

The fact that we have people orbiting the planet in a space station or have landed a craft on the surface of Mars hasn't changed our awe of the universe, or it's Creator. I assume we've all experienced a moment along with the psalmist in Psalm 8 in which we gazed up at the heavens< the earth and the stars and wondered, what is man that you should be mindful of him.

Is God mindful of us? Does God care for us? Could God forget us? When the author of Isaiah seeks to reassure the readers that God will not forget about them, the writer chooses an illustration of a mother and her nursing child. Does God care for you? *Can a nursing mother forget her hungry child?* Enough said. Nothing has changed about that strong relationship between mother and child.

Much of the wisdom found in the Sermon on the Mount translates easily across generations and cultures. We are very much like the people to whom Jesus spoke these words. Jesus knows our human nature so very well.

When reading the scriptures, we are cautioned to take into consideration the people Jesus was speaking to: their economy and political realities, their social relationships, the meaning of the words spoken. It usually matters a great deal to understanding what Jesus might have to say to us today. But sometimes the text needs no explanation at all, no research into the context. It's just about God and people as they are now and apparently always have been.

The Sermon on the Mount is known in some cultures as The Great Instruction. It is addressed to those who have already chosen to follow Jesus, offering guidance on how to live in ways in which they can find wholeness, ways that are pleasing to God. And live in healthy relationship with God, with others, and even within themselves.

Discipleship causes us to re-examine ourselves and all our relationships. Jesus is forever pushing his followers to set priorities, re-set our perspective, to focus our gaze on points further from ourselves, and align our path in God's direction.

Jesus talks about money and wealth more frequently than any topic except prayer. His instruction in our gospel today is less about the type or the number or the cost of the things we own than our relationship with them. Jesus does indeed know us well and warns us not to get too attached to things that don't matter because it is just so easy to do. He cautions us in this passage not to become so anxious and fearful about our money and our things that instead of loving people and using things we will use people and love things.

Jesus wants us to be intentional in all our relationships – with God, with people and ***especially intentional*** with the things in our lives. Because he knows how seductive possessions are and how easily we allow them to occupy our lives. Know when you have enough things. Choose your relationship with your possessions. Know when you've had enough worry..

Jesus directs us not to be anxious, not to worry about food or drink or clothing. I don't know about you, but when someone tells me not to worry about something, I immediately suspect there might be something to worry about. And that there are probably things to worry about that I haven't yet imagined. I can worry with the best of them, because God has given me a very vivid imagination.

Worry reveals the uneasy relationship we have with our control of the world about us. Worry convinces us that we either have more control than we actually do, or none at all. And like every other relationship, there must be some balance. Too little worry and we are apathetic and useless. Too much worry and we are paralyzed.

In order to lead productive, faithful lives, worry needs to be put in its proper place. Worry can easily distract us from things that are more important, which move us farther away from God. Martin Luther suggests that worrying about small things and ignoring what is of more value in life is like being concerned about the décor of your house rather than those who live there with you.

If we think of worry as a choice we make, perhaps we can redirect it, perhaps it can help us direct our thinking and our understanding of the world. As long as we are human, we will worry. As long as we are human, we will need a certain amount of worry. We need a certain amount of pain and stress in our lives, in order to make us aware of danger, or move us into action. But we don't need worry to run our lives, and lead us into directions we don't need to go.

Jesus says: if you really want to worry about something, make it something important. Don't worry about food, clothing; worry about justice, reconciliation, equity among people. These are what are most important in the kingdom of God.

Worry "gone wild" is a misuse of imagination. Use the imagination God gave you not to worry about material things, but to bring about God's values of freedom and peace in the material world. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and its righteousness and all these things will be added unto you. Get your priorities straight.

Jesus suggests that we take control of our worry by rationing it. Therapists tell their patients to worry for _ hour a day and be done with it, Jesus tells us to worry for today and not about tomorrow. This way we have a chance of keeping things in perspective.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are not called to a life outside of the material world, but to a way of living differently in the material world. God's liberating power makes all kinds of relationships different. Our relationship with God himself. Our relationships with those we know well and those we don't. Our relationship with our self, our thoughts and attachments.

Unlike God, there are limits to our time, our efforts and energy, and our imaginations. And we cannot serve two masters: Following one direction requires abandoning another direction. So budget your passion as well as your money. Think about your worry as an imaginative investment of time and energy. Where might it be put to its best use? What might you do with the time and energy you save by **receiving** the care God offers you rather than worrying about it?

When you go for a walk on a warm summer evening, pay attention to the birds flying overhead, the grass beneath your feet, the children's voices down the street --- and know that just as surely as God cares for them, Jesus says, God cares for you. Thank God! That is one less thing to worry about!

