

***Sermon for Sunday 8 February 2026 – The Second Sunday before Lent – Revd Simon Pitcher***

***Genesis 1.1–2.3; Psalm 136.1-9,23-26; Romans 8.18-25; Matthew 6.25-34***

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. Please do be seated.

Jesus tells us not to worry, which we might think is an unrealistic instruction to be given, not to worry. Thinking about the wisdom of not worrying, I found this little extract of wisdom on the internet to share with you.

In life, there are only really two things to worry about. Either you're well or you're sick. If you're well, there's nothing to worry about. If you're sick, there are only really two things to worry about. Either you'll get better or you'll die. If you get better, there's nothing to worry about. If you die, there are two things to worry about. Going to heaven or going to hell. If you go to heaven, there's nothing to worry about. If you go to hell, you'll be so busy shaking hands with all your friends that there'll be nothing to worry about. So why worry at all? Well, I don't think Jesus wrote that. I don't think that's the wisdom of Jesus. But why do we have this reading today about do not worry?

We've just celebrated the end of the Epiphany season. Last week we celebrated Candlemas, and there are two Sundays, this Sunday and next, before we enter into the season of lent. And in that little gap, we have this reading where Jesus tells us not to worry. He tells us not to worry because when we do worry, when we are consumed by worry, we lose sight of our relationship with God. And as a consequence of that, we feel alone and we can feel lost. The whole narrative of the Bible points towards the fact that when we worry as human beings, we lose our relationship with God. But when we appreciate that we are in his care and in his keeping and members of his kingdom, our worries, our anxieties take on a different, less self-destructive tone. And the culmination of the biblical story, which we will celebrate at Easter, is of a God who sent his son, Jesus, to remove our need to worry about things, to bring us back to himself. So do not worry, says Jesus, do not worry about your life.

When I imagine Jesus, he doesn't appear in my imagination as somebody who spent his life worrying. He seems to me to be somebody who enjoyed life, a happy person, someone who enjoyed the company of other people, somebody who enjoyed and lived because of his relationship with his father. There were indeed many circumstances in his life that would cause most of us to worry a lot. He had no home, he had no money, he had no possessions whatsoever. He knew that going to Jerusalem would ultimately lead to his anguish in the garden of Gethsemane, followed by his arrest, the betrayal of his friends, and the horror of crucifixion. We know, too, that he broke his heart with grief at the grave of his friend Lazarus. We know that

despite the many generous and loving things that he did in his life, the authorities were hostile to him, objecting vociferously to his ministry. For most of us in those circumstances, we would find that we had an awful lot to worry about. We would worry, but Jesus was not a man to worry.

Instead, I suggest he was a man of joy, someone who would be a delight to be with. Jesus walked the byways and the paths of Galilee. And Galilee is a very beautiful part of the world. There is the lake, the beauty of the lake, shimmering in the warmth of the sun. All around the lake are low hills, coloured with the natural greens and browns of creation, fields and meadows filled with wild flowers, every colour and scent, the singing of the birds in the air, the buzzing of insects. Jesus walked in Galilee, and he would have seen the beauty of creation. He would have seen the hand of his loving Father upon all the natural world that is all around us, the good worlds that we heard in our first reading today that God has created.

And enjoying the natural world inspired Jesus to reflect on the fact that if such a thing as a wayside flower could be so beautiful in colour, so complex in shape, so rich in scent, reflecting the glory of God, and yet swept away in the instant by the swish of a passing donkey's tail or trampled on by a goat, if such an irrelevant thing could show the beauty in the creation and the joy of his Father, then how much more do we? If we reflect on the glory of God, why would we allow worry to overwhelm our trust in our loving Father God? Our first reading today was a description of the creation of our world. We see in that text this unfolding sense of joy and awe and wonder, the beauty of our world, the joy that Jesus experienced as he walked in Galilee, a good creation reflecting the love of God. So Jesus approached life as a gift, life to be lived, life not to be wasted, life to be enjoyed, life that is not a punishment, but it is a pleasure. A gift from God.

Well, some of Jesus's contemporary teachers maybe preached a different message of woe and gloom, messages of an angry, vengeful God who disapproved of anything that might make us smile. And the Church sometimes has done quite a good job of that, too. A self-denying sort of God. God whose every sentence begins with 'Thou shalt not...', a God who makes us feel guilty. But that's not who Jesus is. Jesus in this passage is not telling us that we can't wear earrings or God will be cross with us. He's not telling us we can't have a glass of wine with our lunch or God will be cross with us. Some preachers have done a good job of using the text to say those things, but that's not what Jesus is saying. What Jesus is saying is that those things are not what life is all about. They're secondary to our relationship with God, and God has given us life to be enjoyed in relationship with him. And in that relationship, we know our true worth and the real purpose of life.

A few years ago, there was a TV programme on channel 5, in which a group of young women went to stay with some nuns in Norfolk for a few weeks. These young women were quite

wayward young women from Norwich. They were really invested in clothes, makeup, living good, the fullness of life, you might say. Whereas the nuns were the complete polar opposite, as you can imagine, no makeup and wearing nuns' habits and so forth and living a simple life. The TV programme was exploring how these two cultures would meet and interact with each other and what impact they would have on each other. It transpired as the programme developed over the weeks that the young women opened up and talked about themselves to the nuns, about their makeup and about their clothes and about their self-esteem. It transpired that all of them felt unworthy, unloved, unvalued, not worthy of a place in the world, ugly, not worthy of being appreciated by anybody. And therefore, all the makeup and the fine clothes were an outward attempt to address this in a sense of not feeling at all worthy. And the nuns were able to say to them gradually and lovingly over the weeks, 'Well, God loves you. God's made you. You're beautiful without all of those things, why do you need to worry about them?' And gradually, the young women came to change their sense of self. And the final episode of the programme was that a young woman was able to post her first ever photograph of herself on social media without makeup. And she broke her heart because she felt that she was able to love herself. She gained new insights into herself.

I think that's what Jesus is talking about when he tells us not to worry. Our purpose is to live in relationship with God and to allow that relationship to shape how we see ourselves and how we interact with each other, to build together the Kingdom of God, to make known the love of Christ Jesus for each one of us, to live our lives with a different perspective on things to the way of the world, a world that might tell us that we're unworthy, that we're of no use, that we're inadequate in every possible way. And yet in the eyes of God, each one of us is precious, unique, valued, and loved. Jesus, who said, 'Come unto me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I refresh you.'

I found another comment of wisdom about worrying on the internet. One world weary woman wrote, 'At the age of 20, we worry about what others think of us. At the age of 40, we don't care what they think of us. And at the age of 60, we discovered they haven't been thinking about us at all.' Well, at 20, 40, and 60, Jesus does think about us. And soon it will be Lent, and we will follow the Lord to his cross. And he takes upon himself there all those things that make us feel unworthy, all those things that make us worry, all the sense of unworthiness, unloved, betrayed, and broken. And those things he takes to the grave and he leaves them there. And in his resurrection on Easter Day, we find Jesus in a new, refreshed, beautiful garden, one that mirrors the one that we heard in our first reading. A message that tells us that as the sun comes up, it's a whole new day in which to live and move and have our being. Don't spoil it by worrying about not being loved. Do not worry, says Jesus. So as we step through Lent, like those young

women staying with those nuns all those weeks, we too can leave behind the things that we worry about and seek him first and his kingdom.

Augustine of Hippo said, 'Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.' And when we enter into his rest and we realise that we are indeed loved, that we're not alone, that we're cared for and blessed, that indeed we have less to worry about, more to be joyful about, more to be hopeful about, more to live for, more that's possible in Jesus's name. Amen.