

Bristol

Reading: Proverbs 3:1-18; Gospel: Luke 12:29-31 "Do not worry"

Pentecost 12

August 7, 2016

I'm sure most of you have done this mental exercise. But take a moment, and concentrate really hard. Close your eyes if you need to. Now, listen and do what I say. Don't think about elephants.

What are you thinking about?

The same holds true for this phrase...Do not worry, do not worry, do not worry. Stop worrying...and we worry more.

Even if 98% of things we worry about never happen...that doesn't keep us from worrying.

That phrase just irks me – don't worry, just trust God. Strive first for the kingdom of God. And it will all be fine. But it can't be that simple.

Now take another moment, and share your worries with those around you.

Why? Because we all have worry, though we usually hide behind our smiles and pleasantries, its okay to confess your worries.

You may ask me – what do I worry about. – Our apple tree being destroyed by Japanese beetles. Anya and Lindsay. Getting my to do list accomplished, at home and at work. I worry about Bristol and the people. I worry about senseless killing, war. I worry about What is truth and what are lies in the media, our government.

My question to explore is, what is the opposite of worry? Is it trust?

In reality, isn't life more complicated than dividing everything up so neatly into two opposing and contradicting camps. Sometimes, proverbs and wisdom literature seems to tell us that everything is either black and white: wisdom and foolishness; light and darkness; knowledge and ignorance; modesty and vanity; goodness and evil.

Is it so easy to say – don't worry, just trust.

Isn't our society tempted each day to make everything black and white, and ignore the gray area.

But there is gray area – in most things – and it is okay.

Maybe our greatest learning, our greatest wisdom is that we do not have to figure it all out. Uncertainty, doubt exist and are wonderful for wisdom. Life may seem easier in black and white. But it is okay to have a little color.

Proverbs sets up these dueling vices or virtues, that are helpful to frame problems and pose questions, to guide us in conversation. It is like a parent who tells us that we know right from wrong, it starts the conversation, but isn't the end. Even last week, your pastor said wisdom can be obvious, knowing good from bad.

We can't simplify our conversations, our life, or explain God, or wisdom in such limited expressions. We can't reduce everything down to either/or, republican/democrat, black lives/police lives, Christian/Atheist, Saved/Damned,

Gay/Straight, or follow the 10 commandments. Real wisdom is accepting that there are more than one answer or two sides to a question. Accept that who we are as children of God is more than our demographics or political leaning. We are a diverse community, the falls in a variety of places on the spectrum of life. And that is a gift.

- Les Mes – stealing a mouthful of bread...

In seminary, my professor Phil Baker said he labeled himself a theological conservative, and a social liberal. I wasn't always sure what that meant. One daughter was married to another woman, his other daughter was married to a faithful Islamic man – and there he and his wife, heterosexual Christians. And he said –his family Christmas picture was an image of God's kingdom in heaven. But is was far from black and white definitions.

Phil, nor his family fit any stereotype. And neither should we try and fit anyone into our understanding of faith and life. God allows a lot of gray area.

- Proverbs is concerned not so much with issues of salvation but with issues of everyday life: economics, friends, family, work, sex, politics, etc. Those everyday wisdoms where our characters are formed as we acknowledge the spirit's presence in all areas of life, across the spectrums that threaten to divide and define us.

Obviously proverbs encourages the wise to pursue virtue rather than vice, to make good decisions, as our parents drilled into us. But at the same time realize that the characteristics of God, loyalty and faithfulness, forgiveness and grace, love and compassion, acceptance and unity – happen in the middle.

Remember, God came to us, not because it was the wise thing to do, not because we made all the right decisions, but the very opposite. We were, and are filled, with foolishness. And God came because God still wanted to save humanity. A gray area if there ever was on. But God still chose to come and be with us. Work with us and through us. To redeem us despite our foolish sin. To love us, and to allow us to love others, even when it is underserved.

As God's followers seek to imitate God's characteristics, we incarnate God's very character. Trusting the Lord is imitating God's characteristic traits, shown to us, so that we may show them to others. Without relying on our own insight, our own decisions, our own wisdom, our own heart and will and mind, but relying on God's character, heart, and mind – in us.

But, God has ample space to work in the gray area, between our worry and full trust in God. God does not expect anything to be cut and dry, black and white.

And we trust that God works across all colors, all wisdom and foolishness, and every single life. We grow in our trust simply by admitting that we do not know enough to guide our own life.

And God does. Amen.