

**SERMON FOR THE 16<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
(Cape Town - 20 September 2009)

**Text:** <sup>25</sup> "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? <sup>27</sup> Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? <sup>28</sup> "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. <sup>29</sup> Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? <sup>31</sup> So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' <sup>32</sup> For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. <sup>33</sup> But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. <sup>34</sup> Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Matthew 6:25-34)

As I have noted already, this is a very special day. It doesn't happen often that an young adult approaches you and says: "Pastor, I would like to be confirmed." That is exactly what Konrad did approximately a year ago. And Konrad, I am so happy and grateful towards God that we can confirm you in your faith today.

Despite Confirmation I have decided to keep to the sermon text for this Sunday, the 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost. The reason is simple: First, it is *wonderful* sermon text, and second, I felt, it is a topic that I personally need to reflect on.

The topic is "Do not worry". I must confess, I worry quite often, and these worries sometimes cause me sleepless nights. Of course I know, worrying serves no purpose at all. But I seem to do it nevertheless. And I can imagine that - at times - you may also be struggling with worries. It just seems to be part of human makeup that we "worry" about things.

Even celebrities worry and sing about it. Maybe you have heard Bobbie McFerrin's song entitled, *Don't Worry, Be Happy*. It goes something like this: "Don't worry, be happy! In your life there may be trouble, When you worry, you make it double, Don't worry, be happy!....[ and so on]"

And McFerrin is right: Apart from not solving any problems by worrying, it is bad for our health. A Mental Health Committee in Australia reported a few years ago: "Half of all people in our hospital beds are there because of the effects of worry." Worry robs us of our sleep, causes headaches and heart problems and worst of all: The next day when we wake up, the issues we worried about are still there.

Of course it isn't quite as simple as Bobbie McFerrin's sings: "Don't worry, be happy". I assume, he knows as well as we do, telling or even commanding a person "not to worry" does not work. You need to discover not only the "cause" of you worry, be it your children, a struggling business, or the exams that are to be written, you need to understand "why" you are worrying (the mechanism behind it).

That is exactly what is being addressed in our sermon text . But to start off with, let us be clear about what Jesus "does not" say. He does not say: Like the birds of the air you do not need to plan for the future. Planing and making provision for the future is essential. Nor does he say: Things like food and clothing for the body are not important. They are important, and he confirms it later, when he says: **"Your heavenly Father knows that you need them"**.

The problem is not the planing or the thinking ahead. We all need to do so. What, however, is wrong and detrimental for our health, is the "worrying" aspect about it. At the core of our worrying is a "self-concern". I am concerned about "myself". And it is only when I can't find a solution *within my own grasp*, that I really start to worry. Those are the times when I am short tempered and shout at my family, or I worry to such a degree that I become totally despondent and morbid about life.

This “self-concern” you don’t see in the bird of the air or the flowers of the field. They sing and they blossom without a “personal” concern in their future.

What I can tell you assuredly today is: God never intended you or me ever to worry. He wants us to plan ahead, but at the same time he wants us to radiate beauty as the flowers of the field, irrespective of the what the future holds. Likewise he wants us to be happy and content as the birds of the air, even if hardship is around the corner. God does not want us to worry about “our self”.

But “why” do we worry? We get a clue to this question in the verse that precedes our sermon text. We read in verse 24: **“No one can serve two masters... You cannot serve both God and Money.”** And then our sermon text starts with the words: **“Therefore, I tell you, do not worry...”** There is clearly a link between “serving money”, or “serving the *things* of this world” and “worrying”. That is a “truth” I need to accept. We do have our personalities. Some people worry more than others. But the root of my worries, my self-concern, is that things of this world are too important to me and start to control my life.

Worrying is really a matter of not allowing God to be God. It is a matter of pushing God off his throne, and placing myself on the throne. If I reflect on my own life, I realise, I begin to worry, when I think I should be in control of something and suddenly become aware: I am not! That is when I worry.

The problem is: I have dethroned God. I want to be on the throne. I want to determine my future. And without realising it I have transgressed the very 1<sup>st</sup> commandment: **“You shall have no other gods”**. My work is my God, my child is my God, my house is my God, my pension is my God. I am serving money.

Again, there is nothing wrong in making provision for the future. Again, there is nothing wrong in working hard to achieve certain goals. Things however do go wrong, when I place my TRUST in these “things” and in “myself” to secure them. That is when the worrying starts. Martin Luther said in his explanation to the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment: “I should fear, love, and trust in God above all things”.

I have begun to realise: Worrying is a sign of the sinfulness within me. The “I” is too important and the trust of “God” too little. It is this TRUST IN GOD that Jesus is trying to raise in our sermon text.

For this purpose the birds of the air and the flowers of the field are indeed good examples. They can’t really care for themselves. They are dependent on what is given to them. And do you know what? God provides for them. Free from any self concern, they chirp along when the sun rises and blossom in the heat of the day, irrespective of what the future holds.

But we worry, despite the fact, as Jesus says, that we are far more important to God than the birds of the air and the flowers on the field that blossom today and die tomorrow. **“O you of little faith”**, Jesus says. Do you think, God doesn’t care for you? Do you think that God doesn’t “*know*” what you need. He knows. And two times Jesus reminds his listeners, that the God who created the universe, who cares for the birds and the flowers, is our “heavenly FATHER”.

Reflect on that for a moment: The creator of the universe, and more important, the one who didn’t even spare his only Son for you on the cross, is and wants to be your heavenly Father.

Later on in this service Konrad will confess his faith in God (together with us), by saying: **“I believe in God the Father Almighty Maker of heaven and earth”**. What this confession, among other, means is: I am going to trust this God. I am going to trust him with every aspect of my life. I have recognised him as my heavenly Father, who will never desert me.

It is not always easy to keep this faith. And strictly speaking most of us should have learned our lessons by now: Think about your past worries, those sleepless nights you had. Did God ever desert you? In times of trouble, did he leave you alone? I don't think so. Maybe you still had your fair share of hardships, but wasn't he there with you *in* your hardships? And did he not take you *through* those hardships? So why do you worry about the future?

The question is: What can help us to stop worrying? Jesus provides the answer. He says: **"Seek first his [God's] kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things [that you worry about] will be given to you as well."** (v.33). Seek "first". It is a question of what or who is "first" in your life. God or you? God or the things of this world?

The word "seek" implies a *continuous* action. You do it again and again. When you get up in the morning, give Him time "first". Don't just rush into your day. Say to God: "God, this is your day". And then trust him. Take all your worries and cast them onto him. Don't just place them there. "Cast" them like a javelin thrower and like a good athlete practice it every day: Get up and cast. Get up and cast. Why don't you try it?

Or when the new week starts, again seek Him "first". This is where God's people gather and practice trust in God. It is far more important than anything else.

Or in the middle of the day, when you suddenly feel anxious or frantic, just stop and like good sportsman, take some time out (just a minute) and reflect: Who is in control of my life? And cast your worries onto him.

But let me make it clear. The words, "Do not worry", are not first and foremost a command. These words are an invitation. Jesus invites you to let go of your worries. In Matthew 11 he says: **"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest"** (v.28). Do you hear the love? There is a God that cares. There is an all-powerful God who will never desert you, not even in death. Here is an invitation to live one day at a time. Jesus taught us to pray: **"Give me this day my daily bread"**. Tomorrow he is still going to be there.

Konrad, today you will be confessing your faith, your trust, in this God. That is the best thing you can do. He will always love you and he will never desert you. And I pray for God's peace on your life. Amen.

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