

## ***Don't Worry, Live Faithfully***

Luke 12:32-48

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Back in the 80s there was a popular song performed by Bobby McFerrin, titled, "Don't Worry, Be Happy." McFerrin wrote the song after he saw a poster of an Indian mystic and sage. McFerrin thought the words, "Don't Worry, Be Happy" provided a nice philosophy for life in just four words.

It's a song about facing adversity in life with a positive outlook. The song is sung to an upbeat Reggae rhythm, with the words, "Don't worry, be happy," peppered throughout the lyrics. Let me read a few of the lines (If I were to sing the verses, I think it would probably kill the happy message of the song!):

"In every life we have some trouble, but when you worry you make it double. Don't worry, be happy..."

"Ain't got no place to lay your head, somebody came and took your bed. Don't worry, be happy. The landlord say your rent is late; he may have to litigate. Don't worry, be happy."

So I guess that's the secret to life: Don't worry, be happy.

In all honesty, there's a lot to be said about having a positive outlook on life. It is a positive outlook that sees a glass as half full. It's a positive outlook that makes lemonade out of lemons. So there's something to McFerrin's philosophy.

But on its own, the philosophy doesn't give you much to lean on. It provides you with an encouragement for a positive outlook, but it doesn't really provide you with any substance as to why you have any right not to worry, or any real reason to be happy.

I mention this because two thousand years before McFerrin came up with the catchy jingle, Jesus was addressing our tendency toward fear and anxiety. "Don't be afraid, little flock," Jesus told the crowd gathered around him in the first verse we read from the gospel of Luke this morning.<sup>1</sup> "Don't be afraid." He was wrapping up a teaching that we have encountered in other gospel lessons, namely, where Jesus begins by saying, "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear..."<sup>2</sup> It is a teaching in which Jesus assures us that by worrying we never are able to add anything to our lives.

But it's more than just a "Don't worry, be happy" philosophy that Jesus admonishes us to live. Because when he tells us not to worry, or not to be afraid, Jesus gives us the basis for our worry-free living, and that is the providence and care of God. The birds don't worry, and God feeds them, doesn't he? And look how splendidly the lilies of the field burst forth in color—they don't worry one bit about how they appear, do they? If God treats the birds of the air, and the flowers of the field, with such care and beauty, don't you think God will care for you, as well?

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 12:32

<sup>2</sup> See Luke 12:22; Matthew 6:25

“Don’t be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”<sup>3</sup>  
It is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom...

You see, God’s disposition toward us is to bless us. The God of the universe—the God who created the heavens and the earth, the God who put the stars in place and knows them by name, the God who has numbered the hairs on your head (admittedly less challenging for some than for others!)—this very God, holy and mighty, has chosen to make us heirs of the kingdom. I think it’s a tragedy that some have an image of God as one who is at a distance, watching the human race with disapproval, waiting for an opportunity to smite us for our sinfulness. It’s a tragedy, because the truth is God is disposed to bless us, not curse us; God has chosen to love us and reconcile us unto him, not cast us aside.

Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

It is a reminder of the promise repeated throughout the history of the people of God: “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.”<sup>4</sup> “If God is for us, who can be against us?”<sup>5</sup>

Do not be afraid, for it is your Father’s pleasure to give you the kingdom. Don’t worry.

But Jesus doesn’t stop by telling us not to worry. Jesus doesn’t just say, “Don’t worry, be happy.” Instead, Jesus tells us to live a life that demonstrates freedom from anxiety and fear. And in this morning’s text he gives us two words of advice: Live generously, and live faithfully.

The first teaching after exhorting us not to worry is to live generously. “Sell your possessions, and give alms,” he tells us.<sup>6</sup> One of the hallmarks of a worry-free life is generosity. It’s no secret that Jesus criticizes hoarding material goods for ourselves. It’s no secret that Jesus blasts our tendency toward greed. But it’s not always a critique of our selfishness. Sometimes our tendency to keep things for ourselves is borne, not so much out of indifference toward others, but more so out of fear and anxiety that we won’t have enough to live. And so if we take Jesus’ words to heart, and truly believe that God is generous in his provision of what we need, then we, too, will live with generosity toward others. The command to sell your possessions and give to the poor is not so much a mandate for universal poverty, as it is to release those things we hold onto for security, and put our trust instead in God, whose pleasure it is to give us the kingdom.

Henri Nouwen begins his book *With Open Hands* by telling the story of a woman suffering from a nervous breakdown who is brought to a mental hospital for treatment. The intake process requires that she be relieved of everything she has brought with her: clothes, purse, jewelry, etc. The attendant takes everything from her and inventories it. But then he notices that the woman’s fists are clinched tightly, as though she is hiding something.

The attendant asks her to open the hand, but the woman refuses. The attendant then tries to pry her fingers open, but she resists with every ounce of strength. Finally, the attendant calls upon a team of orderlies to hold the woman still so that her hand can be pried open. And when he finally does so, all he finds in her palm is a single, thin dime.

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<sup>3</sup> Luke 12:32

<sup>4</sup> Jeremiah 29:11

<sup>5</sup> Romans 8:31

<sup>6</sup> Luke 12:33

It isn't much. In fact, it isn't even the most expensive thing the attendant had had taken from the woman. But to the woman, that dime represented the last vestige of her hope that she could control her own future. So long as she had that dime, she believed, she could at least make a phone call to the outside world.

Nouwen goes on to note that this incident was the key to her recovery. Once the dime had been taken from her, she no longer had any reason to keep her fists clenched. And once she opened up her hands, once she relinquished the notion that everything was up to her, she was able to receive the gifts of others.<sup>7</sup>

Don't be afraid, little flock, for the Father desires to give you the kingdom. Let go of those things that hinder your dependence on him, so that you may receive the blessings he has for you.

Don't worry. Live generously. Let those things that are important be the things of the kingdom. Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.

And live faithfully, in the manner of the good servant. Don't slack off, don't let up. Jesus tells two parables to help us understand the call to live faithfully. First, he tells of the servants who await the return of the bridegroom, so they can be ready for service when he returns. Then he tells of a servant who is busy doing the work his master had told him to do in his absence.

It is a reminder that, though our Lord has not yet returned, his absence is no excuse for us to fail to be his faithful servants. Will we allow our uncertainty as to the date of the Lord's return erode our clarity of purpose, or will we act as if the date of his return is really no business of ours, and instead concentrate on doing the things he has called us to do?<sup>8</sup>

It is an age-old challenge for us. How will we act in the Master's absence? Will we do that which the Master has told us to do, or will we disobey and revert to our former ways?

Most of us can relate to those times when we were in school, and the teacher would have to leave the room for a few minutes. She would tell us stay at our desks, and that she wanted to find us quietly doing our work when she returned.

Only, how often did all the students do as the teacher said? Invariably, as soon as she was out the door, some would get out of their seats and throw erasers, and shoot spitwads, and tease the quiet ones. The classroom would instantly become a scene of chaos, as students would joke around and find any number of ways to goof off and not do any work.

Except maybe for one or two students, who would quietly remain at their desks, obediently doing their work.

When the teacher returned, don't you think she noticed the ones who were being good, and those who weren't?

Blessed is the servant whom the master will find at work when he returns home. Live faithfully. Don't slack off, don't let up. You are a child of the kingdom; live appropriately, live obediently, live faithfully.

My friends in Christ, the world is full of reason for fear and anxiety: Natural disasters, economic uncertainty, the threat of terrorism, fear for those who serve in harm's way to preserve our freedom, the constant concerns about health and physical well-being. Yet in the midst of it all, Jesus tells us not to worry,

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<sup>7</sup> Story recounted in sermon by Fred Holper, "God's Good Pleasure," August 8, 2004, [www.fourthchurch.org](http://www.fourthchurch.org)

<sup>8</sup> This question is raised by Richard Steele, *Lectionary Homiletics*, August/September 2007, p. 14.

to put our fears aside. He tells us this, because he knows that our security is not in the things of this world, which are perishable; rather, our security is found in God, who provides for us with more care and abundance than the birds of the air or the flowers of the field. And it is God's good pleasure to bless us and give us the kingdom.

Therefore, fear not. Instead, live the life you were meant to live, and be the person you were meant to be—a precious child of God. Blessed are you when our Lord returns and finds you living as such.

Amen.