

‘Do Not Worry’ – The Chaplain’s Reflection for Sunday 3rd May 2020

At University, I had a friend who was a rather ‘Eeyore’ character. He could be relied upon to caution all of our plans with suggestions that it might rain, or might not work, or just not be the fun we thought it would be. I always think of him when I read the passage from Matthew about not worrying. Discussing it one day, he said, “Oh, you mean that bit where it says tomorrow will bring more things to worry about.” I had focused on the birds and the flowers and the provision of God’s goodness; he had heard the last verse and simply thought that, as he had feared, tomorrow would bring more troubles.

At the moment I seem to be constantly thinking about what we are going to eat, far less about what I am going to wear. The food bill has gone up during lockdown but the washing has gone down. Like many of you, perhaps, I am beset with worries, particularly worries about the future. How long will this last? When can I see my friends again? As my husband said to me this morning, this is a particularly bad time for extroverts who get their energy from people. (He is an introvert finding more time to write). Will we find a way to contain this virus? What will the economy be like? How will we get back to normal?

I also spend time feeling guilty. My lockdown experience is good; I have space inside and outside, I have family to talk to and share the cooking and eating with, I have found it relatively easy to access good food, our jobs are secure, and none of my loved ones are in categories of high risk. I wonder if I should be doing more somehow. Is my staying in enough of a help in this time of crisis? Each week I fill in a questionnaire from UCL, who are studying the impact of lockdown on people. I answer questions about my eating, drinking, TV-watching habits and also about my worrying. How much worrying am I doing about a range of topics?

So, what do we make of Jesus’ exhortation not to worry? The word ‘worrying’ originally meant to harass or bother or strangle someone or something else. We still use the term when we talk about dogs worrying sheep. It is interesting to think of that image when we consider how worrying can feel; our thoughts bothering and harassing us, nipping at our proverbial ankles, and disturbing our attempts to calmly get on with life. It is about the unsettling thoughts that do not lead us anywhere except into increasing confusion.

Of course, we need to be properly concerned about our needs and the needs of others. It is the unproductive worrying that this passage refers to. We are urged to get some perspective, to look at the natural world and see that plants grow and flowers bloom, birds find their food and sing their songs. They are busy and active; this is not a call to passivity. However, we are told that the flowers and birds do not get into those unproductive spirals of worrying about things they cannot control: they simply get on with doing what they were made to do. We are told to learn from them. Yes, take proper care for what you are meant to be doing, but don’t allow concerns about things you cannot control to distract you and tie you up in knots.

The anthem the choir have recorded today from their various homes is ‘Locus Iste’ by Bruckner. This is often used when we give thanks for a particular church building, and it has been sung many times in Trinity Chapel to mark special occasions. As I hear it, I think of

being in that beautiful space. In normal times, when I am worrying too much about something or someone, I love just going into the Chapel, even if it is just for a few minutes. The beautifully crafted space was built to last; it has contained the worries, prayers and praises of generations of people, and as the anthem says, it was made for God. Being there helps me to hand my worries over to God. To pause for breath and to get things in perspective. It helps me to ground myself in the goodness of God and to trust that, with God's help, I will find the way through the particular situation I am worrying about, even if it is still not clear how.

At the moment, I cannot go into the Chapel, but I can still find ways to ground myself in God's love. I can do so by focusing on the beauty of the natural world. I can use art or music. I can also use my memory to take me into holy places like our Chapel and find that sense of peace. So, if your thoughts are worrying at you like a dog at the sheep, try to find a place of calm. Know that God loves you, recognises your needs and concerns, and promises to sustain you through the times of uncertainty.

"Do not worry about your life ... look at the birds of the air ... are you not of more value than they?"

Amen.

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