

Don't Worry 'Bout a Thing
Matthew 6:25-35
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First United Methodist Church, Baraboo
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I suspect that what you'll remember after today is not my sermon, but the choir singing Bobby McFerrin's 1988 hit song "Don't Worry, Be Happy." McFerrin was inspired by a poster with a saying of the Indian spiritual leader Meher Baba: "don't worry, be happy." In 1989 "Don't Worry, Be Happy" became the first a cappella hit to make it Billboard Magazine's hot 100 list. It stayed there for two weeks.

Good songs can stay in our heads for a long time. Some of you may remember other "do not worry songs." In 1980, Bob Marley came out with "Three Little Birds" which came to be known as "Don't worry about a thing." The canaries that came to the window sills on his house inspired the words:

Rise up this mornin'
Smiled with the risin' sun
Three little birds
Pitch by my doorstep
Singin' sweet songs
Of melodies pure and true
Saying' (this is my message to you)
Singing don't worry 'bout a thing
'Cause every little thing gonna be alright."

Some may remember a different "do not worry" song: "Don't Worry Baby" by The Beach Boys. Released in 1964, this song made it to Rock and Roll Hall of Fame's list of 500 songs that shaped Rock and Roll. Who would not love to hear these words spoken to them: "Don't worry baby/Everything will turn out alright."

In the scripture today from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus sings his own "do not worry" song. Here, as in many songs, there is repetition. "Don't worry about your life, what you'll eat or what you'll drink, or about your body, what you'll wear. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothes?" (Matthew 6:25). And then, a few verses later "Therefore, don't worry and say, 'What are we going to eat?' or 'What are we going to drink?' or 'What are we going to wear?' ³² Gentiles long for all these things. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them. (Matthew 6:31-32). In other parts of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches the elements of a the life of righteousness: how to establish right relationships with God and others: do not judge, love your enemies, be the salt of the earth and light for the world, do to others as you would have them do to you. But here Jesus is not commanding but asking us

to dream. Dream with me of a world where those who are mourn are comforted, where the poor are blessed, the hungry are filled, the singleminded see God and those persecuted for the sake of justice are rewarded. This is God's dream. The Band has played Bryan Sirchio's song "Dream God's Dream" which uses the imagery of God's dream to talk about the kingdom of God. "Dream God's dream, holy spirit

"Dream God's dream
Holy Spirit, help us dream...
Of a world where there is justice, and where everyone is free
To build and grow and love
And to simply have enough
The world will change when we dream God's dream"

in Matthew 6:25-35 Jesus asks us to dream of a world where everyone knows they are cared for by God. A world where people trust God and put God first. A world where people who have more than they need share with others. God's dream is reflected in the natural world. Jesus says "Look at the birds in the sky. They don't sow seed or harvest grain or gather crops into barns. Yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you worth much more than they are? ²⁷ ... ²⁸ And why do you worry about clothes? Notice how the lilies in the field grow. They don't wear themselves out with work, and they don't spin cloth. If God dresses grass in the field so beautifully, even though it's alive today and tomorrow it's thrown into the furnace, won't God do much more for you, you people of weak faith? Instead, desire first and foremost God's kingdom and God's righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

I believe this passage is meant to be heard like a song. This is Jesus' "do not worry" song. Yes, Jesus makes a nod here to our rational minds. "Who among you by worrying can add a single moment to your life?" Worrying won't get us anywhere – we know that – but we still do it. That's because it's hard to give up the idea that we're in control. We mistakenly think that everything depends on us. But in fact, everything doesn't depend on us. We are all dependent on God. Yet still we worry. In a way it's easier to face fear. With fear we face a clear threat. Worry is free floating. Anxiety arises from uncertainty, ambiguity (and those are here to stay). In this passage Jesus doesn't try to talk us out of worry so much as he nudges, cajoles, woos us into stepping into kingdom living right now – living today in the place where worry is useless because we know God's care and love.

To see how this actually works, I'd like to tell you a story. It's from the life of Jacob Armstrong. His book "Treasure" is the inspiration behind this sermon series. Jacob Armstrong admits "I'm prone to worry. I have trouble with anxiety." He says songs like Bobby McFerrin's help him release his worry. Here's a story about what Jacob Armstrong learned about worry from his wife Rachel. Jacob Armstrong lives near Nashville, TN. Jacob, Rachel and their little girl Mary had spent the day having fun as

a family with in Chattanooga, TN. It had been a day filled with activity, food, and big city attractions. They had just started their two hour drive home. Their little girl was over excited, over stimulated, full of sugar and Jacob and Rachel knew it wasn't going to be an easy ride home unless Mary fell asleep. If she didn't fall asleep, a toddler meltdown was imminent. After ten minutes in the car Jacob looked in the rear view mirror and saw Mary's eyelids starting to droop. A few minutes later, he and Mary heard Mary's rhythmic breathing. The parents breathed a huge sigh of relief. She was asleep. No more worries.

But a short time later an emergency vehicle whizzed past with its siren blaring. Mary woke and began to cry. In a matter of minutes, they were part of a whole string of cars that had pulled off to the side of the road, as more emergency vehicles sped by with their lights flashing and sirens blaring. Now Jacob was anxious. And so was Mary. The screaming toddler was brought into her mother's arms and was comforted, shushed and cuddled as only a mother can do. It's OK, Mary....it's OK" she told the sobbing toddler. It took some doing, but finally Mary stopped crying. By then, night was falling, and Rachel opened her window. "Do you hear that sound Mary?" They were all very quiet. "Mary do you hear the bugs?" The crickets had begun their nightly chorus. It's crickets. They are singing their song. They are singing to you. It's OK...it's OK....it's OK. Mary's breathing slowed down. Jacob's breathing slowed down as well. The family sat quietly in the dark until the road cleared. Jacob reflected later that sometimes kids need to have things repeated over and over: it's OK, it's OK, it's OK." Just like in a song.

Martha Beck is a sociologist, writer and columnist for *O Magazine*. Martha Beck says what we seek from a counselor/therapist is the same thing we seek from a spiritual guide, pastor, rabbi or life coach: we want someone to tell us "don't worry. Everything is going to be OK. " We all need an authority figure to tell us "do not worry. Everything is going to be OK." In a few minutes we're going to sing "God will Take Care of You." The words are by Civilla Martin and the tune is by her husband Walter. The story goes that on a Sunday in 1904 Civilla Martin and her husband were staying in Lestershire, NY where Walter was collecting hymns for a Bible training school. They were planning to travel to another town that day. Walter had a preaching assignment. Civilla woke up sick that morning. Her husband Walter was about to cancel his plans and stay home with his wife. But then, their youngest child piped up and said "Oh Daddy, you don't have to stay home because of mother – God will take care of us." Walter left for his preaching assignment, that day Civilla wrote the words to the hymn "God will take care of you" and when Walter came home she showed it to him, and he sat down at the little organ in the room and composed the music. God will take care of you, through every day, o'er all the way; he will take care of you, God will take care of you."

Here is the good news: the risen Christ comes with the wisdom of a child and singing: "God will take care of you." The Risen Christ comes as a loving mother, who shushes

us when we feel panic and cajoles and sings to us “do not worry” until we settle down. Jesus our divine therapist assures when we seek God first, then “everything is going to be OK.” As you leave here today humming to yourself “don’t worry, be happy”, may that be our affirmation of faith: that God will provide exactly what we need for today. And we can trust God will do the same tomorrow too.

Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.