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Reframe: Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

Luke 12:22-31

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Before I begin, I want to make a distinction between worry and anxiety. They are not identical twins. They're more like kissing cousins. Here are some general distinctions between the two:

- We tend to experience worry in our head and anxiety in our bodies.
- Worry tends to be specific while anxiety is more diffuse.
- Worry can be uncomfortable while anxiety can be crippling.
- Worry tends to be controllable, anxiety much less so.
- Worry is considered a normal psychological state, while anxiety is not.

I want to be clear that what I'm talking about today, and what I think Jesus is talking about in our scripture reading, is garden variety worry, the kind of worry we all experience from time to time. If you're struggling with anxiety, or suspect that you are, please seek professional guidance and help. With that, let's hear today's Scripture reading which comes from Jesus' Sermon on the Plain in which he describes life in the Kingdom of God, life under God's reign of love.

Then, turning to his disciples, Jesus said, "That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food to eat or enough clothes to wear. For life is more than food, and your body more than clothing. Look at the ravens. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for God feeds them. And you are far more valuable to God than any birds! Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? And if worry can't accomplish a little thing like that, what's the use of worrying over bigger things? "Look at the lilies and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?

"And don't be concerned about what to eat and what to drink. Don't worry about such things. These

things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers all over the world, but your Father already knows your needs. ³¹Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and he will give you everything you need.

This is the word of God for the people of God.
Thanks be to God.

It's so easy to hear these words from Jesus in a shaming way. That is to say, we can hear Jesus' words and come away feeling that we are bad people because we worry. But I don't think that is Jesus' intention. I think Jesus' words are meant to bless us, not shame us. Jesus loves us and wants what is best for us. Even if we worry every day for the rest of our lives Jesus' love for us is unchanged, but worry is less than Jesus' best intentions for us. So, why is Jesus so hard on worry? I would suggest three reasons.

First, excessive worry is physically and emotionally unhealthy. It keeps us so focused on a future that doesn't yet exist that it blinds us to the gift of the present moment. And over time, excessive worry has physical consequences – headaches, digestive issues, decreased immunity and even premature coronary artery disease. Not only will worry not add a single moment to your life, but it can also shorten your life and deaden your days. Sound good to you? Doesn't sound good to Jesus either, which is why Jesus warns us against it.

Second, worry is unproductive. It's wasted energy because it's usually focused on things that we ultimately cannot control. You can't control tomorrow because it isn't here yet. You can't control the health of a loved one. You can't control whether your company will eliminate your position. You can't control what your kids or grandkids will do or what will happen to them. No matter how much you worry, those things are out of your control.

A few weeks ago, I was talking to a friend who was consumed with worry because her boss had scheduled an unexpected meeting with her the next day. She was convinced that she was going to be let go, and the thought made her sick to her stomach. She couldn't concentrate all day, and she couldn't sleep that night. I called her the next day to see how the meeting went and she sheepishly told me that the purpose of the meeting wasn't to

let her go, but to let her know that she was being promoted. "I can't believe I wasted a whole day and night worrying about it," she said. Been there? Done that. Worry is unproductive!

Third – and this is the real issue at hand - worry reveals our lack of faith and trust. Jesus said, "Look, God provides food for the birds, and dresses the lilies so beautifully. And since you matter to God so much more than birds and flowers, don't you think that you can trust God to care for you?" In other words, Jesus isn't so much chastising us for worrying; he's urging us to trust.

Over and over again in Scripture we are urged to entrust what we cannot control to God. Here are just a few examples:

Give your burdens to the Lord, and he will take care of you. – Psalm 55:22

Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you. – 1 Peter 5:7

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. – Philippians 4:6-7

So, we have a choice. We can worry about things we can't control, which is both unhealthy and a waste of time and energy. Or we can prayerfully entrust what we can't control into God's care and experience peace. Simple, right? Well, it may be simple, but it isn't easy. And as I've wrestled with worry in my own life, I've experienced two reasons why it isn't easy.

First, it's hard to give up control. Even though intellectually we know that worry isn't effective at changing anything, on an emotional level we often believe that somehow we can control the uncontrollable by worrying. It seems counterintuitive that simply entrusting our cares to God could be more effective than working ourselves into an emotional sweat. It's not unlike learning to float in the water. It's hard to believe that simply lying back and relaxing is more effective than flailing. Truth is, giving up control takes humility, trusting that God can, and we can't.

And second, many of us believe that worrying is out of our control. Telling me not to worry is like telling me not to breath. It's out of my control. But

the truth is, worry is a learned behavior. Small children don't worry. They learn to worry. And so did we somewhere along the way. Worry is a habit. And like all habits, the worry habit can be broken. Though I've never been much of a worrier, every time Nancy or one of our boys goes to the Mayo Clinic for their annual cancer screening, I can feel worry creeping into my heart like a vine creeping up a wall. It whispers, "What if?" What if they find new tumors? What if the cancer has spread? What if they need surgery? What if it's inoperable." And I've learned that that is the moment of choice. If I entertain those thoughts, if I feed them with my attention and energy, I get caught in a loop of catastrophe and despair. Before long I'm despondent because my wife and children are dead and gone...which is ridiculous because in that moment they are alive and quite well! So instead, I do what Scripture says. I take a deep breath and entrust Nancy and our boys into God's care. I admit that I'm powerless to control their health and I ask God to love them and hold them and heal them. And while I know that that doesn't mean that their cancer will never spread, I have experienced peace in the face of uncertainty.

"Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?" Nope! But when we entrust what we cannot control to the One who loves us we can move through uncertainty with hope and peace.

Ready to start the journey of breaking the worry habit? There's no time like the present. So let me invite you to close your eyes and bring to mind something that worries you. Bring to mind some circumstance that is beyond your control and is calling down the rabbit hole of "what if".

Now imagine placing that worry into your cupped hands and offering it to God.

Now let's the words of this prayer be your words, "God, I give to you this burden. It is heavy on my heart, and it is beyond my power to control. I entrust it into your care, and I ask you to give me the strength not to take the burden back from you. Teach me to rest in the promise of your love and care. Amen.