

Thanksgiving Eve
November 25, 2009
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Oh man, here it comes! You know...the next 40 days, a seemingly endless marathon of parties, social gatherings, and consumer culture. Yes, THAT time is upon us once again. Tomorrow marks the beginning of this period of high stress in our lives which stretches unmercifully into the new year. I find it highly ironic that this great day on which we give thanks for the many blessings in our lives almost inevitably turns into a worry fest.

We heard Jesus say, "Do not worry about your life." Yeah right, Jesus, are you serious? I've got twenty relatives coming over for dinner tomorrow and two turkeys to cook in a one-turkey oven, and you're telling me not to worry? If it wasn't for that annoying relative who won't stop blabbering, then maybe I could make it through the day, but seriously? I mean, isn't worry a part of our culture? We're supposed to worry. If we're not worrying, then clearly we're not working hard enough. We recently finished the World Series, but I feel like worry is our national pastime because we're really good at it.

It's like Jesus was speaking these words with us in mind, knowing that we would need some reassurance at this particular time, on this particular occasion. I picture Jesus speaking to the crowd on the mount, singing the words to that famous song, "Don't worry...be happy."

If you think about it, what's the value of worrying really? Jesus says it more eloquently than I can, "Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?" Jesus really hit the nail on the head with that one. Worry can just suck the life right out of us. The word for worry in the original Greek text is *merimnao*, which translates as "to have anxiety, be anxious, or be unduly concerned."

Unduly concerned...that really stood out to me. Are we unduly concerned because we've lost sight of the basics? Maybe a lot of this worry that we have is not really legitimate worry at all. I remember, back in high school, I read a book called *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff*, by Richard Carlson. I was so stressed out at the time by the college application process. The process is quite arduous, but I was really letting the situation get the best of me. I completely lost sight of the big picture. Instead of focusing on the fact that I even had the opportunity to go to college and receive an education, I was having apocalyptic visions of epic failure, envisioning being rejected by every institution, or at least not being accepted by my first choice. I was unduly concerned for unlikely scenarios which had no basis in current reality, and, looking back, there were certainly no legitimate reasons to think that epic failure would happen.

The book, *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff*, helped me to put the entire experience into proper perspective. The author's basic contention is that we allow ourselves to get worked up over things that, upon further examination, aren't really that big of a deal after all. We can spend so much of our life's energy on "sweating the small stuff" that we lose sight of the beauty in life. Instead of seeing a family gathered joyously around a table for Thanksgiving dinner, we're worried that dinner is an hour late and that the green beans are slightly overdone.

Don't Sweat the Small Stuff is certainly not the only book of its kind. There's an entire industry of self-help books and speakers, all trying to help us minimize our collective stress. Clearly it's a perennial concern for us because the industry keeps growing and growing. We had the privilege of having a workshop here at Holy Trinity two weeks ago, "Unplug the Christmas Machine." Such a popular workshop shows that the holiday season is indeed an ongoing period of worry and anxiety for many of us.

Certainly not all worries are worthy of our concern, but, at the same time, we do have some very real worries hanging over our heads, and I don't want to minimize those at all. Some of us worry about how we're going to make ends these days. Seemingly every sector of the economy has been hit with layoffs, including our own church body. With winter on

the way, hefty bills for gas, water, and electricity are just around the corner, not to mention the extra winter clothes that we need to stay warm. Others of us worry about health insurance. Many people live day-to-day without health insurance, just hoping that disaster doesn't strike because they're not sure how they'd pay for their medical bills. These worries are one thing when we're single and looking out just for ourselves, but when we find a significant other or add children to the mix, the worries seem to grow exponentially. With children, we worry about the rising cost of education. We want our children to receive the best education possible, but financial concerns often end up dictating what we can provide. The list of worries goes on and on. Needless to say, they're real and ever-present.

It's to all of us who find ourselves in the never-ending chain of worry that Jesus is speaking tonight. Jesus promises to give us what we need. He reminds us that we are of great value to God, saying, "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear... indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things." Surely, if God takes care of the birds of the air, then we know that God will care for us. God earnestly and lovingly worries for our well-being.

God's help comes to us in and through each other. The community of faith here at Holy Trinity is remarkable at being God's hands in the world. In the short time that I've been here, I've witnessed God working through all of you to address the worries and concerns of others. The beauty of faith communities is that we are present for each other in these times of worry, lifting each other up and bringing God's blessings into each other's lives. Every Sunday, you provide a welcoming, hospitable place for people to come and feel the love of God regardless of who they are. When our society tells a person that he or she is unworthy of love because he or she is gay, Holy Trinity extends God's love and welcomes that person into this space. When a person feels estranged from organized religion but needs a community to explore spiritual issues and concerns, Holy Trinity opens its doors. You also reach out to others outside this space by working with other organizations, such as the Lakeview Shelter, the Lakeview Pantry, and the Night Ministry. For a person living on the street, God's presence is given in a cup of hot soup and a winter coat.

God uses each and every one of us to carry out God's work. At times in our lives, God will call on us to be a blessing to other people. God will work through us to address the worries and concerns of our neighbors. At other times in our lives, we'll be the ones who need to humbly receive from others. Giving can be difficult, but admitting that we need help and receiving it can be just as hard, if not more difficult. Both giving and receiving are ways to experience God's abundant goodness in our lives. When we experience the grace of God, we're freed to turn from the paralyzing effects of our worry and extend those blessings to others.

Tomorrow, many of us will gather around a family table and give thanks for the presence of God in our lives. That table won't be much different than the freestanding table right over there, where week after week we bring our worries and the worries of the world. At the table, we give thanks because Jesus lovingly worries for our well-being and comes to us in the bread and wine, taking our worries upon himself, reminding us that he is always present in our lives. And so, tonight, we celebrate the greatest Thanksgiving feast of all, the feast of life and salvation.