

## CCV Matthew 6:25-33

May the words of...

What are you worried about? What causes you to fret? There are no doubt many possibilities.

In this challenging economic time, money worries are a reality for many. Will we really be able to keep our homes warm through the last stage of winter? For some of us, health concerns, physical or mental, either for ourselves or those we love, are rarely far from our minds. It's hard, I think to watch the news these days and not be a little anxious, with war engulfing many parts of the world and rising global temperatures. Levels of chronic, clinical anxiety are rising rapidly in our society and especially among young people.

In this context, Jesus tells us "do not worry." Well, if you're anything like me, you'll read that and you'll want to throw your Bible across the room, because it sounds so patronising. "Don't worry" Well, Jesus, I wouldn't worry, if I wasn't waiting for hospital tests to come back. Jesus I wouldn't worry if my job was more secure.

How can he be so condescending?

One answer to that challenge is that I don't think he's quite addressing genuine serious concerns of people who don't know how their health will fare or where their next meal will come from. His target isn't so much people who want basic provisions, after all he's told us just a few verses earlier that it's good to pray for our daily bread. He's aiming his words at people who want control, people who not only want their daily bread, but people who want to be sure exactly where they're daily bread is coming from and how they're going to get it. I think there's something of that in most of us.

After all, isn't it more relaxing when we can say not just that everything will probably be OK, but that everything will definitely be OK, because we're in complete control. Don't we all sometimes want to know, not just that we'll have what we need, but that we know we'll have it, because we control how we get it. Well, it's this attitude, this need to be in control, that Jesus challenges. Jesus invites us not to long to control everything, to rest in the calm of not knowing exactly what will happen next. Instead Jesus invites us to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Jesus invites us to trust his control rather than panic that we're losing control. Jesus invites us to strive for his kingdom.

The kingdom of God is the times, people and places in the world, where God's kingship is acknowledged, where God's writ runs, where God not only is king, but people honour him as king.

As we panic that our lives aren't going as we want, Jesus says the important thing is whether or not the world is going as God wants. When we start worry about that, our other worries will seem a little smaller. When we find ourselves asking the question "how can I resolve this difficulty in my family?" or "what will happen with this health problem?", Jesus invites us to ask instead "how can I act with God's values in that situation." That is always a question we can answer. That is always something we can do and we can be in control of. We can't always solve our problems. We can always respond to our problems according to God's values. We're rarely in control of our circumstances, we're always in control of our actions and attitudes, so when we focus on bringing our actions and attitudes in line with God's kingdom, we're working on something we can control and that means we'll be less anxious.

When we're concerned about our money, the question isn't where will I get money from, it's how can I honour God in this time of financial pressure, because that's something you control, so you don't have to be anxious. When we're concerned about our work and our tasks, the question isn't how will I get it all done, but how can I honour with the limited time I've got and that's something you can control, so it's easier not to be anxious. For me, there are many aspects of my life, my family, my work, which I wish I could control and when I think about them, I want to control them all the more and so I get anxious. But when I seek the first kingdom, I start thinking about my own choices to seek first the kingdom, and that I can control, so I'm not so anxious.

Of course, this doesn't mean we don't ever work or plan or do our best to provide for ourselves and our families. God wants us to provide for ourselves and our families and so that's part of seeking the Kingdom.

I think that's part of the point of the analogy of the birds. I love seeing birds and listening to their song. One thing I've learned is that a bird is either asleep, doing something useful or dead. Birds never just worry. While they can move their wings, they are gathering food and that means they don't have time or head space to worry and guess what? They seem to manage to find food rather often.

Jesus says it's similar with us. While we've got blood in our veins and breath in our lungs, let's use it for something useful, let's use it for the kingdom and we won't have head space to worry and guess what? God might just meet our needs rather often.

That's what it means to strive first for the kingdom. As we do that, we know wonderfully that God is building the kingdom and will one day fully bring it in.

That's celebrated beautifully in the OT reading.

v.24-26.

This is the world God is going to create, a world of peace and abundance.

God will have his way in all the world. All the universe will joyfully reflect God's goodness and love and all suffering and evil will be gone.

Often you hear Christians say they look forward to going to heaven. In other words, we will escape this sad, broken, hurting world for somewhere better. Well, not according to this reading. According to this reading, we don't leave this world and go somewhere better. One day this world becomes that better place. One day all the world will be part of God's kingdom.

One day Vienna will be fully part of God's kingdom. One day sin and suffering and sorrow will be gone from Rennweg, the Ring and every one of our numbered districts. This city will still be here, but all sin and suffering will be gone.

That wonderfully means all that we love in this world will still be here. The earth on which we stand will never again shake and bury children under rubble, but it will still bring forth beautiful rocks and gemstones. Fire will never again trap children in buildings, but it will still griddle steaks to perfection. The snow and frost will never cause us to get chills or slip and fall, but it will still gild the grass with crystal.

That is the kingdom God will inaugurate. The more we think about that kingdom, the less we'll worry, because we know that in that kingdom, God will not only give us all we need, but all we could possibly want. When our eyes are fixed on the new world God is making, we won't worry about this world, because that world will be a place where there is no need, no sorrow, no suffering, nothing we could ever have to worry about. All will be beauty, glory and joy.

Jesus' antidote to worry is seeking the kingdom, focussing day-to-day on how we can be part of the kingdom and keeping our eyes on God's final kingdom.

Amen.