

“Provisions”  
Matthew 6: 24-34  
Sunday, February 27, 2011  
The Rev. Sharon Snapp-Kolas, preaching

Scripture. Prayer.

**Opening.**

Leonard Sweet tells this story about two men who were shipwrecked on an island. “The minute they got to the island, one of them started screaming and yelling, ‘We’re going to die! We’re going to die! There’s no food! NO water! We’re going to die!’

“The second man, in a quite relaxed manner, propped himself up against a palm tree. He was acting so calmly, it drove the first man crazy. He began to shout, ‘Don’t you understand? We’re going to die!’

“The second man replied, ‘You don’t understand. I make \$100,000 a week.’

“The first man looked at him quite dumbfounded and asked, ‘What difference does that make? We’re on an island with no food and no water. We’re going to DIE!’

“The second man, with great serenity, answered, ‘You just don’t get it. I make \$100,000 a week, and I tithe 10 percent of the \$100,000 to the church. I have no worry whatsoever. My pastor will find me!’”

David Beckett writes, in his book, Hakuna Matata, “A man was seen fleeing down the hall of the hospital just before his operation. A security guard stopped him before he could leave the hospital and asked, ‘What’s the matter?’

“The man said, ‘I heard the nurse say, ‘It’s a very simple operation, don’t worry, I’m sure it will be all right.’”

“‘She was just trying to comfort you,’ said the security guard. ‘What’s so frightening

about that?’

“‘She wasn’t talking to me,’ exclaimed the man. ‘She was talking to the doctor!’”

Jesus says, “Do not worry about your life.” But we do worry, don’t we?

## **I. Human Anxieties**

Eric S. Ritz writes, “I like the story about the two mountain boys who spotted a bobcat up a tree and decided to have some fun. One said, ‘I’ll shinny up that tree and chase him down, and you put him in a cage.’

“The other agreed, and the first fellow climbed up the tree. When he reached the right limb, he started shaking, and the cat came tumbling down. The other fellow grabbed the varmint by the back of the neck and tried to put him into a cage. There was a terrible commotion. Dust and fur and skin were flying in all directions. The fellow in the tree called down, ‘What’s the matter, you need help catching a little ol’ bobcat?’ ‘No,’ replied his friend, ‘I don’t need no help catchin’ him, but I sure need help turnin’ him a-loose.’

“The problem with worrying,” continues Ritz, “is that it is easy to do but so hard to let loose. It is a power that controls our lives.”

Brian Stoffregen shares these statistics about worry:

“Stress management experts say that only two percent of our ‘worrying time’ is spent on things that might actually be helped by worrying. The figures below illustrate how the other 98 percent of this time is spent:

“40% on things that never happen

“35% on things that can’t be changed

“15% on things that turn out better than expected

“8% on useless, petty worries.”

I like James Merritt’s approach to the topic. He writes:

“The U. S. Bureau of Standards says that a dense fog extensive enough to cover seven city blocks, 100 feet deep, is composed of one 8 ounce glass of water divided into 60,000 million droplets. Now think about that. One 8 ounce glass of water, spread out, can stop an airport in its tracks. Worry is just like fog. Just a little bit can stop you dead in your tracks. That's why worry is so fruitless.”

Susan R. Andrews quotes twentieth-century theologian, Paul Tillich, and his definition of anxiety:

“‘Anxiety,’ he says, ‘is the state in which a being is aware of its possible nonbeing. Anxiety is finitude, experienced as one's own finitude.’ And then” writes Andrews, “Tillich suggests three kinds of anxiety - the threat of three kinds of non-being...There is the anxiety of death...Then there is the anxiety of meaninglessness...And finally, there is the anxiety of guilt...”

“What Jesus is suggesting this day is that this awareness of our possible non-being, this acknowledgment of our finitude, is a part of the reality of God's creation. And it is only through grace that God can make happen what we cannot make happen ourselves.”

We worry about things we can do nothing about. Jesus tells us, instead, to “strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

When we worry, when we are anxious, it is because we allow ourselves to focus on our own strength, rather than relying on the power of God alone. Jesus reminds us of what our priorities should be.

## **II. God's Timeframe**

Jesus reminds us that God provides for us. Jesus says, "Do not worry...Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?...Look at the birds...Consider the lilies...Therefore do not worry...strive first for the kingdom of God..."

But who is this God whom we can trust so well, who knows our every need and who promises to provide for us? He is the Alpha and the Omega, the one who is and who was and who is to come. He is eternal in his being and in his power.

There is a legend about a bird and a rock way up north in the land of Suitjod. Once every thousand years the bird pecks at the rock, which is 100 miles wide and 100 miles high and 100 miles deep. And once the rock has been worn away, so the legend goes, one day of eternity has passed.

This is the time frame of our eternal God, our all-powerful Creator and Redeemer. And so why are we anxious, asks Jesus. Has anyone, by worrying, ever added one minute to the length of his life? God, in his own time, will give us all that we need. For there is more to life than food and clothing. What is essential is that we seek God's kingdom and God's righteousness.

Robert Burdette wrote this piece, called "God's Days":

"There are two days in the week upon which and about which I never worry -- two carefree days kept sacredly free from fear and apprehension. One of these days is Yesterday. Yesterday, with its cares and frets and pains and aches, all its faults, its mistakes and blunders, has passed forever beyond my recall. It was mine; it is God's.

"The other day that I do not worry about is Tomorrow. Tomorrow, with all its possible adversities, its burdens, its perils, its large promise and performance, its failures and mistakes, is

as far beyond my mastery as its dead sister, Yesterday. Tomorrow is God's day; it will be mine.

"There is left, then, for myself but one day in the week - Today. Any man can fight the battles of today. Any woman can carry the burdens of just one day; any man can resist the temptation of today. It is only when we willfully add the burdens of these two awful eternities - Yesterday and Tomorrow - such burdens as only the Mighty God can sustain - that we break down.

"It isn't the experience of Today that drives people mad. It is the remorse of what happened Yesterday and fear of what Tomorrow might bring. These are God's Days ... Leave them to God."

C. S. Lewis wrote, along similar lines, "The future is something which everyone reaches at the rate of 60 minutes an hour, whatever he does, whoever he is."

Part of letting go of worry, the advice seems to be, is to leave God's time to God, and to take our finite, human lives, one day at a time. Mainly because we can't handle much more than that.

Of Rainbows, Geese, and Wildflowers, John Killinger writes:

"I think about something John Leax, the writer, says. John lives on a small farm in New York State and teaches writing at Houghton College. There is never enough time to do all the work on the farm, and the old orchard, planted higgledy-piggledy long ago by someone on a hillside, is neglected and overgrown. One day John was driving through the large, carefully groomed orchards of central Ontario, and found himself vaguely depressed by the endless rows of well-ordered trees. He reflected on his feeling, and on the sense of being at home in his own little, poorly tended orchard. Why was that, he wondered. It had to do, he finally concluded, with the way a small orchard fits into the scheme of creation, with many people caring for their

tiny plots of ground. The huge orchards of the conglomerates, on the other hand, were sad reminders of the commercialization of the land.

“‘Perhaps this is why,’ he says, ‘though I feel my failure to bring the old orchard to fruitfulness, I feel no real guilt, why in fact I feel a sort of pleasure in watching it turn wild and useless. When I walk in it, it tells me that a man's caring comes to an end. It tells me that life is lived within the boundaries of extremes, of wildness and domestication. It tells me that my order is not the only order. And in its message I feel comfort.’

“His order is not the only order. And that is what he finds comforting. That is what we would all find comforting, I suspect, if we spent more time studying the lilies -- the rainbows, the geese, and the wildflowers.”

“...wildness and domestication,” “His order is not the only order.” If we could somehow accept God’s order of things, we might worry less. This is part of our spiritual work as Christians, to continually remind ourselves of God’s order of things. We remind ourselves by what we give our attention to. If we give our attention to the wonder of God’s creation, we are reminded that God is in charge and all is well. If we give our attention to the biblical record and God’s promises written there, we are reminded that we can turn all our worries over to him. If we give our attention to showing love to our brothers and sisters in Christ, we are reminded that God had given us a wonderful family of faith to carry us through the hard times. God does provide, in so many ways.

### **III. God’s Provision**

Now some might question the simplicity of this idea. Clearly there are many good Christians the world over who seek God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness and who still do not

have enough food to eat and enough clothing to wear. God does not seem to adequately provide for everyone.

At least two points can be made regarding this dilemma.

One is that God's timing is eternal. All people will be fed and clothed when the end times are here, when Christ returns to usher in the kingdom in its fullness. On that glorious day there will be no hunger. None of God's children will lack for anything.

In the meantime, there will be those faithful Christians who suffer in poverty. And remember, by the way, that Jesus died on the cross. He knows our sufferings. He suffers with us.

Mark Trotter tells a story that is very helpful in clarifying these matters:

“Arie Brouer,” says Trotter, “was a Reformed pastor, part of the Reformed Church in America. At one time he was the General Secretary of the National Council of Churches. As a Reformed pastor, he was part of the Calvinist tradition, and the tradition that has the strongest emphasis on God's sovereign rule over the whole creation. It was the Calvinists after all who invented predestination to affirm that God is in control of everything. Every single move that we make is controlled by God.

“Then Arie Brouer got cancer. A terrible theological problem for any sensitive Christian, but I would think especially so for a Calvinist. His son asked him about it in the most innocent way. ‘What does faith mean for you now that you are facing this?’

“Arie Brouer responded by saying that he had believed in God all of his life, and because he has cancer is no reason for him to stop believing in God. His son said, ‘But you and mom have spent a lot of your life trying to make this a better place for all people. This is a very strange way to be paid back.’

“Brouer said to his son, ‘Steve, I don't believe that God wants me to have cancer. But what I have come to believe during these days is that God can't do anything about it. That raises some very fundamental questions for me about what I have been taught and what I have believed over the years about the almightiness of God. Because if God can't stop this, then I have to come to some new understanding of God's almightiness, or perhaps reject it altogether. I haven't had time to think about this because I am too busy dealing with all sorts of survival questions. But I am going to work on it.’

“And he did. He counted the number of times God's ‘almightiness’ is mentioned in the New Testament. He discovered it is only ten times. Nine of the ten times are in the Book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, the vision of the end of history. He said, ‘I looked at those texts that talk about God's almightiness, and I discovered that every one of them has to do with God's ultimate triumph in history. They say that at the end of history, God's love, and justice, and peace, will prevail. At the end of history, God will prevail in the struggle, and that now God is with us in the struggle. And I said to myself, ‘Arie, why in the world haven't you understood this before?’”

The first point concerning the question of God's provision in the face of human suffering is just that, “At the end of history, God will prevail in the struggle, and that now God is with us in the struggle.”

The second point is that if we seek God's kingdom, we become a part of the Christian community. And the Christian community has an ethic of caring for the needs of others. So we care for others as we are able, and others care for us as they are able.

In the process, many people are fed and clothed who might otherwise not be. Jesus' promise that God will care for us is partly fulfilled by people who day by day live out Jesus'

teachings. The more we care for one another, the more God's kingdom appears on earth. As we seek God's kingdom by caring for others, we discover God's kingdom in the midst of that caring.

God's Provision for us is simple, yet profound. He provides the Holy Spirit as our friend, our guide and our comforter. He provides the Holy Scriptures as the revelation of his Son, to guide and teach us. He provides Church, to be a people who love Jesus, who follow him and who seek to do his will; and to be a people who love one another and love others in his name. These are the provisions of God for his people.

And, finally, God provides the beauty of his glorious creation: the starry sky at night; birds in flying in dizzying formations; trees rustling in a gentle breeze; the clean smell of the air after a good rain, the taste of a snowflake on your tongue. God provides the wonder of life, the wonder of creation, the wonder of the universe.

### **Closing.**

Tony Campolo writes, in his book, Becoming What God Intended You to Be:

“At Eastern University, where I taught for so many years, I would constantly encounter students who would ask a simple question: How can I know what God wants me to do with my life? What a question! But I could never answer the question because I'm not sure that Jesus wants us to look that far ahead. I'm convinced that what Jesus calls us to do is to solve this problem: What should I be doing today? He says quite pointedly, ‘Take no thought for tomorrow what ye shall eat, what ye shall drink. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.’

“Are you going to do what God wants you to do today? That's the ultimate question. Everyday you should get up and say, ‘This is the day that the Lord has made. What does God want me to do? What does God want me to achieve this day?’”

G. K. Chesterton reminds us of whose we are:

There was a man who dwelt in the east centuries ago.

And now I cannot look at a sheep or sparrow,

A lily or a cornfield, a raven or a sunset,

A vineyard or a mountain, without thinking of Him.

“Do not worry,” says Jesus.

We can trust that God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer – has already provided for all our needs, yesterday, today and forever. May you be freed to do what God wants you to do today.

Amen.