



VILLAGE
CHURCH
Presbyterian (USA)

The Practice of Letting Go

SCRIPTURE:
Matthew
6:25-34

March 3, 2024 — Sermon by Rev. Dr. Rodger Nishioka

I struggle with this passage. We are still in the midst of Jesus' sermon on the mount, and he says, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink or about your body, what you will wear." Do not worry. It seems far too simplistic for Jesus simply to tell us not to worry. Even worse, some well-meaning preachers and teachers use Jesus' words to beat us up. They tell us to stop worrying and have more faith. I do not find that helpful when you've been told you (or your loved one) has a life-threatening illness. Or when you just got laid off. Or when you are battling an addiction. Or when your school goes on lock-down.

Telling someone to stop worrying is like telling someone to stop thinking about elephants. As soon as someone says that, what do you think about? Elephants. When Jesus tells his followers to not worry about what they're going to eat or drink or wear, he's not saying we should all go around hangry, dehydrated and naked.

No. Ultimately Jesus is saying be careful where you put your trust. The clue comes to us in the verse just before this passage. Verse 24 reads, "No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." That's the context for these verses. That's the antecedent to "Therefore..."

Every moment we are faced with a choice. Trust in God or trust in ourselves. I don't know about you but Sunday after Sunday when we have those moments of silence in our prayer of confession, my perennial confession is, "Lord, you know this. I put more trust in me than I do in you. Help me to trust you more." Most often for me, when I worry, it's out of my need to control everything.

I need to let go of my need to control. I need to let

go of the belief that I alone need to fix everyone and everything.

Tomorrow night our Session, the elders of our church, will be looking at the 2024 budget. You have been, and continue to be, so generous and I am grateful but overall our giving is down from last year. We're projecting a budget deficit of about \$138,000. That's not terrible on a \$7 million-dollar budget—it's just under two percent—but it's still a lot. It started off looking a lot worse but many of you stepped up with even more generosity. Still, I was not sleeping well for a few nights because once again, I feel responsible for everything. I was worrying.

Some of you know that I live about a mile and a quarter northwest of our church and when I don't think I'll need my car, I walk to church. A couple of weeks ago, I was walking to church on 64th Street and I looked up and in this beautiful tree, I counted four large birds' nests. Because it's winter, there are no leaves so I could see everything. And I stopped and just looked at them and the Holy Spirit brought these words to me from Jesus. "Rodger, look at the birds of the air; they don't plant or harvest or store up food in barns, but God takes care of them, right? Do you think God is not going to take care of you and this church and these people that God loves? You're not being very trusting, are you?"

Trust. When Jesus says, "do not worry about your life," he is calling us to trust more in him, in God, in the Holy Spirit than in ourselves. In that way, he is calling us to let go.

A woman who lived 650 years ago has helped me do that. She lived in Norwich, England in the 14th century. We don't even know her real name. We call her 'Julian' because she built a room attached to St. Julian's Church in Norwich. Her background is not fully known, but we know that early in her life she had a husband and children and all of them perished

during the first great plague that killed nearly one third of Norwich's population. She walled herself in a room with no doors next to the church. The room only had two windows—one open to the church so she could hear the service and the other open to the street where she would talk with people who were troubled and where she could receive gifts of food. She is the first woman to publish a book in English. It described what she called her "showings." These are visions of Jesus Christ that came to her. She has become known as one of the great mystics. Her only serious flaw as far as I can tell is that she loved cats but God can forgive all transgressions. She wrote many prayers and in one of them she writes:

"On one occasion, the good Lord told me: every kind of thing will be all right. He desires us to understand that not only does he concern himself with great and noble things, but equally with small and simple things.

Now, there are many acts committed that to us seem so evil and so harmful that we despair of any good resulting from them. While we are in sorrow and mourning and worry, we cannot relax in God's exalted and wondrous wisdom. So God tells us: You will yourself behold that all shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well. It is

as though he is telling us, Take it now and trust, and you will see truly, in all fullness and joy. So I ask the Lord to help us trust that nothing is forgotten and to give us strength to meet the events of our lives, believing that in God, all shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well. So we may surrender our worry and anxiety so that our spirits may be at peace in love."¹

I have taken that phrase into my heart and in moments of worry and anxiety, I breathe deeply and repeat slowly and deliberately, "All shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well."

Whether you are facing chemotherapy and immunotherapy. Facing a job search. Facing the heartbreak of a broken relationship. Facing a budget deficit. Facing the death of a parent or spouse or child or beloved pet. Facing despair and hurt and confusion.

Trust this. All shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well. So this week and in the days ahead, when you find yourself consumed by worry or anxiety, along with me, quiet your heart, take deep breaths and say, "All shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well."

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹ *All Will Be Well. Julian of Norwich.* Compiled by Richard Chilson. Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press (2008) p. 35-37.