

“What, Me Worry?”

I do not think that anyone can doubt that we are living in difficult if not downright dangerous times. It is enough to make a Tibetan monk give up meditation and become a video gamer.

While there is much to be concerned about, we know that worrying about it gets us nowhere. You don't need to trust me on this as there are many great aphorisms about worry.

“Worry is like a rocking chair: it gives you something to do but never gets you anywhere.”—Erma Bombeck

“When I look back on all these worries, I remember the story of the old man who said on his deathbed that he had had a lot of trouble in his life, most of which had never happened.”—Winston Churchill

“Every tomorrow has two handles. We can take hold of it with the handle of anxiety or the handle of faith.”—Henry Ward Beecher

And then there is what Jesus said to us about “Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?”¹

Tough stuff, but very few of us are like Alfred E. Neuman the mascot of Mad Magazine whose catch phrase was, “What, me worry?” If worrying accomplishes nothing what are we to do in these dangerous and stress filled times?

I think one answer is in today's passage from Isaiah. First of all, when we read this passage we realize that this is not the only time that the world has been a mess. There always seem to be politicians, corporations, peoples, or nations who are trying to gain water, land, wealth and power at the expense of others. Lust, the basis for all of the deadly sins, keeps the world in turmoil. Sometimes it is at a low simmer and other times, like now, it seems to be on the verge of boiling over. While we feel a heightened anxiety and a sense that we can do nothing about the state of the world God says through Isaiah that we indeed can make a difference.

The Lord says:

“If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,
if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.”

There are possible actions for us to take that will make things better. God says we need to stop yoking others with unwarranted burden and stop blaming others for our miseries. Instead take action to help people, especially the poor and those afflicted with intense misery. These actions are not heroic in scope or nature. If we all chip in one can of food a week to Seven Loaves think of how many hungry people will be fed. If we stopped blaming our personal woes on immigrants and see that everyone has problems and that most people are searching for a better life, we would find our

¹ Luke 12:25 NRSV

commonalities and help each other as neighbors do. If we look at each other as children of God made in the likeness of God, we will find our similarities instead of focusing on our differences.

God tells us that the results of such actions are more than just feeling good.

“The LORD will guide you continually,
and satisfy your needs in parched places,
and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water,
whose waters never fail.”

Of course all of this sounds very agricultural so we must read it with our ears tuned to metaphor. Then we hear that when we live as God asks us to, we are guided in our lives to places that are good for us and healing and happy. Think of how important water is for us and even moreso for the farmer. Water springs that never fail are life-giving especially for those who live in the rugged landscape of the Middle East. Whether literal or figurative water, we find our lives sustained when all lives are.

The prophesy continues with an exalted promise from the Lord, who says that those who care for one another especially the outcast, afflicted and hungry “shall be called the repairer of the breach.” Those who live lives of mercy, love, and justice will be called in the present and the future those who restored the breaks in the world. As Abraham Lincoln said more than 150 years ago when he paraphrased Jesus, “A house divided against itself cannot stand.”² It applies as much now as it did in Jesus’ time and Lincoln’s.

When we are at odds with the world we cannot see the humanity of each other; when we allow ourselves to be manipulated by fear mongers in politics and the fake news business; we forget the teaching of God and Jesus, that we depend on each other to get through life. No one is an island as John Dunne wrote. Or as Charles Bukowski more bluntly wrote, “We’re all going to die, all of us...! That alone should make us love each other but it doesn’t. We are terrorized and flattened by trivialities; we are eaten up by nothing.”

That is not the way I think most of us want to live, but for some reason we give into it. We have a way out of such misery through what God speaks in Isaiah. Care for each other. Give of yourself to others even strangers and the strange looking (after all we all look strange to someone). Be known as one who repairs rather than destroys. Delight in the Lord and let the Lord delight in you.

Live this one life you have been given in such a way that it means something more than the junk you accumulate. In the end our lives are meaningless if fear and loneliness are our closest companions. As the prophet Malachi wrote, “O mortal, God has told you, what is good ... to do justice and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”³ That is the prescription for a fulfilling life.

² Matthew 12:25 paraphrase by Abraham Lincoln as part of his “House Divided” speech June 6, 1858 Springfield, Illinois.

³ Malachi 6:8 paraphrase by the author