

“Don’t Worry, Be Happy”
Rev. Bill Freeman
Sunday, February 26, 2017
Menifee United Church of Christ

In math class, the math teacher, Miss Smith, called on Little Johnny. Miss Smith said, “Little Johnny, if I give you 2 cats, and 2 more cats, and 2 more cats, how many cats will you have?” Little Johnny said, “7 cats.” Miss Smith said, “No, no, no; listen carefully, Little Johnny. If I give you 2 cats, and 2 more cats, and 2 more cats, how many cats will you have?” Little Johnny said, “7 cats.” Miss Smith said, “Well, let me put it a different way, Little Johnny. If I give you 2 apples, and 2 more apples, and 2 more apples, how many apples will you have?” Little Johnny said, “6 apples.” Miss Smith said, “Very good, Little Johnny! Now, if I give you 2 cats, and 2 more cats, and 2 more cats, how many cats will you have?” Little Johnny said, “7 cats.” Miss Smith said, “Where do you get 7 cats from?” Little Johnny said, “I already have a cat, Fluffy.”

We like to laugh. We like to be happy. There’s nothing like a good joke, and while that was probably nothing like a good joke, we still like to laugh and be happy. Readers’ Digest says, “Laughter is the best medicine.” It’s certainly better than a flu shot. We should laugh whenever we can. We should be happy.

What is it that makes you happy? I got a call the other day from my daughter and we talked for 25 minutes on the phone. She lives in Washington, DC, as some of you may know, and that made me happy, to talk to her that long. What makes you happy? Talking to loved ones, being with loved ones, having dinner with friends? Maybe a delicious dessert makes you happy? What makes you happy? I think we should try to be happy whenever we can. Maybe a funny movie makes you happy? Maybe a situation comedy on TV makes you happy? It’s certainly better to be happy than to worry.

What makes us worry? Does our health make us worry? Does a loved one being all the way across the country make us worry? I know it does me sometimes. I worry about my daughter being way across the country. What makes you worry? Does the future make you worry? Does concern about the afterlife make you worry? I hope we can lay aside some of those worries today. Because Jesus tells us not to worry.

Jesus said what good does it do to worry? God takes care of the birds of the air. Of how much more value are we than birds? So, God will take care of us, Jesus seems to be saying.

Basically, Jesus is saying, “Don’t worry, be happy.” Because we are God’s children. We are made in the image of God, created by God, blessed by God, loved by God. God loves each and every one of us. That should make us happy and not worried.

Henry Ford tells us not to worry. We go from the sacred to the secular. Henry Ford, the founder of Ford Motor Company, perfecter of the assembly line, paid his workers five dollars a day, which doesn’t sound like much now, but back then they could at least afford to buy the cars they made. Henry Ford said, “If God is in charge, what do we have to worry about?”

We don’t need to worry. We shouldn’t worry. We should be happy. Life should make us happy. The birds of the air should make us happy because we know Jesus said that God is protecting us. So, we shouldn’t worry.

Today is Transfiguration Sunday. According to the gospel of Matthew, Jesus took three of the disciples, Peter, James and John, and went up the mountain. Once they got up the mountain, Jesus was transfigured. His clothes became a dazzling white! His face shone like the sun! All of a sudden, Moses and Elijah were there with Jesus. Now, we talked in our Bible Study, we’re not sure how they knew it was Moses and Elijah. Somebody suggested that maybe they had name tags: “Moses.” “Elijah.” But, Peter said, “Oh, it is good that we’re here, Jesus! I’ll make a tent for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah!” (Peter was apparently kind of like my wife, any excuse to go camping!) All of a sudden a voice came from heaven, “This is my son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him!” At this point the disciples all hit the dirt, fell on their faces, scared. But when the voice ended, they looked up and everything was back to normal: Moses and Elijah were gone, Jesus was back to normal. As they were walking back down the mountain, Jesus said, “Don’t tell anybody about this until after I’ve been resurrected.”

What does that story tell us? I think the way Christianity has interpreted that story is that Jesus is at least as holy as Moses and Elijah, if not more so. The voice coming from heaven tells us more so, because God says, “This is my son, the beloved.” This story points out the spiritual special nature of Jesus. But I think it does something else as well. I think it should ease our fear about the afterlife, because Moses and Elijah had been gone for hundreds of years, and yet, there they are. Jesus says after he is resurrected they may tell this story, so we know there must be an afterlife. Jesus says in another place that God is the God of the living, not of the dead. That should allay any fears or worries that we have about the afterlife. There is an afterlife. According to this story. According to Jesus. So we don’t have to worry about it. We shouldn’t worry at all.

But then a couple of weeks ago, I went to see my doctor for my annual physical. He had a stethoscope and he listened to my chest and he said, "Take a deep breath." So I did. Then he listened to my back and said, "Take a deep breath." So I did. After he was done, he said, "I'm going to send you for a chest X-ray." Yikes! I've never had a chest X-ray before that I know of or remember. "Why would he send me for a chest x-ray?" I was thinking afterwards. "Maybe he hears that I have lung cancer. I don't know. I've never been a coal miner, but maybe he can hear that I have black lung disease." I went through all kinds of worries. "Why is he sending me for a chest x-ray?" Finally, I went in for the chest x-ray. They took it from the back and from the side. Afterwards, I asked the technician if she could tell me anything about my chest x-ray. She said, "No, that's for your doctor to tell you." I said, "Could I look at it?" She said, "No, because it's connected to a bunch of other people's chest x-rays and the HPA laws say you can't look at it. But your doctor will be in touch with you." Oh. So, I continued to worry. Two days later I got a call from my doctor's office and he said that everything was fine. Hah! Of course, everything was fine. I knew that. I wasn't worried. But, of course I was.

But what good did it do me to worry? Nothing. I just expended energy that I shouldn't have expended. I may have prayed and hopefully that did some good, but worrying, what good did it do? What good does it do us to worry? All we can do is let go and let God. It's in God's hands. Whenever we have anything that we're worried about, that's what we need to do, let go and let God. We don't need to worry.

But even Jesus' parents were worried. You may remember the story from the gospel of Luke about how his parents took Jesus to Jerusalem when he was, like, twelve years old for the Passover. After the Passover festival was over, Mary and Joseph headed back home with Jesus, presumably part of their entourage, their caravan. But after a day or two they noticed that Jesus wasn't with them. Jesus was having a kind of Home Alone moment – his parents left him behind. They were worried about him, so they went back to Jerusalem and looked for him. For three days, they looked everywhere for Jesus. Finally, they found him in the Temple. He was talking to the rabbis. Everybody was amazed because he was asking the rabbis questions, and the rabbis were asking him questions, and his answers were profound. Everybody was amazed. Who was this twelve-year-old who has all these profound answers to theological questions? It didn't seem to impress his parents, though. His parents scolded Jesus, "Jesus, you had us worried! Where were you?" Jesus said, "Well, didn't you know I would be in God's house?"

I don't know about you, but when I was twelve, if I went missing, the absolute last place my parents would look would be inside the church. And I wouldn't be conversing with my minister or giving profound answers to questions. But that was Jesus. Jesus' parents should not have worried, because God watches over Jesus and us and the birds of the air, so there's nothing to worry about. That's the story.

Some of us, though, are worried by the current regime in Washington. We're worried about what will happen to immigrants, what will happen to refugees, what will happen to Muslims, what will happen to transgender people. They have us worried. Some of us. What is going to happen to public education under Betsy DeVos? Maybe, to allay our fears, we have to do something, if we're worried. The other day Lucia Gallo and I and about a hundred other people went to Riverside, where our congressperson, Ken Calvert, was speaking at a \$250 a plate luncheon to raise funds for his next campaign. None of us, apparently, could afford \$250 for lunch, but we did stand outside the Mission Inn, where he was eating, with many other people and people held up signs saying, "Hold a town hall meeting" or "Do your job." Somebody had a megaphone there and a speaker and microphone and we were trying to talk into the area where we thought they were eating, but they wouldn't let us in. I did go in, but I only got as far as the bouncer, who asked me my name and I said, "It's not going to be on that list." I did get to see the folks across the way, but I didn't get in the room. But we did get to make our voices heard.

Then, the next day, Congressman Calvert came to the Menifee City Council at 11 am and spoke to the council for 37 minutes, leaving about 23 minutes for comments from the public. Aimee and Rick were there as well. I was fortunate enough to talk with Congressman Calvert up on the dais. First of all, I assured him, because he had expressed concern in the newspaper that people wanted him to follow the agenda of Nancy Pelosi, so I said, "I want to assure you that I am not here to ask you to follow the agenda of Nancy Pelosi. I'm here to ask you to follow the agenda of Jesus." I went on to say how, when Jesus was a little baby, his parents took him to Egypt because King Herod wanted Jesus dead. Herod was going to kill all the kids 2 years old and under. So, Jesus' parents fled with Jesus to Egypt. Therefore, Jesus was both a refugee and an immigrant. I asked Ken Calvert to remember that when he votes on refugees and immigrants. I also said that Jesus said to care for the poor, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to welcome the stranger. I asked him to please care at least as much about the Have Nots as he cares about the Have Lots. I said I hoped the current regime in the White House also cares at least as much about the Have Nots and they care about the Have Lots. Then I asked the City Council to consider making Menifee a Sanctuary City. The chances of that are probably about the same as me flying to the moon, but I had to ask. In fact, I would like this church to investigate the idea of being a sanctuary church. It would probably cost us some money to put in a shower in the bathrooms. We'd have to clear out some space. But I think that's what this country is coming to, that people who care need to do something. And when we do something, maybe we worry less. Maybe we can be happy.

Stephen Colbert makes me happy. Stephen Colbert is the host of the Late Show, as you know, and a year ago, there was talk of James Corden hosting the Late Show, replacing Stephen Colbert because his ratings weren't great. But now, thanks to the

current regime in the White House, Stephen Colbert, who makes fun of them all the time, is number one in the ratings. That's a wonderful thing. That makes me happy. I love Stephen Colbert and I love John Oliver and I love Bill Maher and I love Saturday Night Live. All of them are helping many of us get through the next four years, perhaps, making us happy for a little while instead of worrying.

Bobby McFerrin has a song, "Don't Worry, Be Happy." We sang it earlier. Bobby McFerrin sings, "Here's a little song I wrote. You might want to sing it note for note. Don't worry. Be happy. In every life, you have some trouble, but when you worry, you make it double. Don't worry. Be happy." That's what we have to do. That's what Jesus tells us to do – don't worry, be happy. That's not just a song, that's something we should take to heart.

What about you? Do you worry? Or are you happy? I hope you don't worry and you are happy. That's a goal of mine, too. Maybe I'll give up worry for Lent. Let us just remember Little Johnny. He wasn't worried about having, apparently, the wrong answer because he knew he had the right answer. He would have 7 cats if she gave him 6 and he had Fluffy. Let us remember the words of Jesus, who said that God cares about the birds of the air, how much more will he care about us? Therefore, we don't have to worry. So, let us not worry!

Let us pray.
God of love,
Help us to not worry.
Help us to be happy.
And help us to know that you love us and watch over us.
Now and forevermore.
By the power of the Holy Spirit.
And in the name of Jesus.
Amen.

*(This sermon was delivered without manuscript or notes,
and was transcribed from a recording of it.)*