

May the words that I speak, and the meditations of all our hearts, be now and ever acceptable in your sight, O Lord our rock and our redeemer.

*Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag and smile, smile, smile.
While there's a Lucifer to light your fag, smile, boys, that's the style.
What's the use of worrying? It never was worthwhile.
So pack up your troubles in your old kit bag and smile, smile, smile.*

The writer of the lyrics to *Pack up your troubles* was actually a Welshman, George Henry Powell. It's the only song that you can find attributed to him. It became, of course, one of the most famous songs of World War I. It won a competition for a marching song to support the morale of the troops. Its words became so well-known that in 1932 it was the title of the movie *Pack up your troubles* starring Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy. Earlier, in 1918, it was the bitterly sarcastic title of one of Wilfred Owen's War Poems, *Smile, smile, smile*. For our purpose today, the line that interests us is the third one: *What's the use of worrying? It never was worthwhile*.

'Don't worry,' says Jesus to his disciples. 'Don't worry about what you're going to eat, or what you're going to wear. Which of you, by worrying, can add one hour to your span of life?' Some of us will find that an easier commandment to live by than others, one suspects. So I thought we might look at what Jesus says that we should do instead. It's a part of the passage we often don't notice. The headline message about what we *shouldn't* do - 'Don't worry...' - drowns out the positive message about what we *should* do.

Some of these things are deceptively simple: 'Look at the birds of the air...' 'Consider the lilies of the field...' Perhaps these are not just illustrations, but positive suggestions about behaviour. Perhaps we would do better, when we are worrying away, to sit quietly in the garden for a while and watch the birds, or to sit quietly in the meadow and contemplate the wild flowers. These simple instructions tell us two things. They tell us, first, how Jesus himself was so completely at home in God's world: peacefully unfrightened by the wind and waves; learning the lessons of the fig tree and the vine; teaching and telling stories about the mustard seed, the sparrow's fall, or the sowing, ripening and harvest of the good seed.

But secondly, and more importantly, they tell us how we might begin to fulfil the most important of the commandments of the passage. How often have we sung it, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and its righteousness;' or in the translation we have today 'Strive first for the kingdom of God and its righteousness. This is surely the heart of what Jesus is teaching.

But how do you do it? If you are seeking the kingdom of God, where will you find it? If you are striving for righteousness, how will you achieve it? The answer to both questions, in the first instance, is the same. The first thing you need to do is stop. Stop worrying, stop looking in the wrong places. Stop worrying about the things that spoil your life today, by infecting it with the worries of tomorrow. Stop striving for the things that cannot add a single hour to your span of life. Just stop: stop and look at the birds; stop and consider the flowers. Wake up and smell the coffee, we might say nowadays. Except that the coffee has been made by human hands, while the birds and flowers, and all the wonder of the natural world, have been given by the hand of the creator, who made it.

And when he had made it all, we read in Genesis today, he stopped. Stopped and rested. And he made stopping and resting a holy thing. You might have thought that it was all that creative activity that was really holy – that it was all the energy and work of the first six days that was truly hallowed, but it was not. It was the seventh day.

‘So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done.’

Just stop.

And once you have stopped, where will you find this kingdom of God that you are seeking - that you are looking for? Is it over here? Over there? Somewhere else? Jesus said ‘The kingdom of God is not over here, or over there. It is within you.’ Or in other passages, ‘It has come near to you...It is among you. It is within you, St Paul tells the clever, clever, philosophers of the Areopagus in Athens: ‘...indeed he is not far from each one of us, for in him we live and move and have our being.’

Remember what we said last week about the old liturgical rhyme: ‘these three Sundays before Lent, help prepare us to repent.’ One of the mistakes that we too often make in Lent is to make our Christian lives get busier: to add on more activities that somehow make us feel more holy. Extra services, or Bible Study groups or ceremonies. All ministers and many lay people are inclined to think this way: somehow to equate holiness, with holy busyness. But what did God do on the holiest day? He stopped and rested. How would it be if, instead of giving up chocolate and other things completely irrelevant to our spiritual well-being, we decided to work a bit less, to fill our lives with less activity, to make a little space for rest and silence and quiet prayer? And if the answer is that you couldn’t do it, because you’d spend all that spare time worrying about all the things you weren’t getting done, then, on the authority of today’s gospel reading, I would say that Jesus would tell you, you probably need to do it all the more. Just stop.

Stop, then, and seek the kingdom of God within yourself and, where you can, among your brothers and sisters. Because the kingdom of God is simply that realm where God is king. It is the place where God is given the highest place of honour. It is the place where all the idols in whose service we worry and scurry about every day - without ever really recognising them for the idols that they are – in the kingdom of God, all those subtly disguised idols are cast down from their thrones, and God is given his proper place.

We finish with another song, this time from the great Bill Caddick, bard of Wolverhampton. It’s called *Unicorns* and I’ve always thought that it’s about a lost sense of the spiritual, which the unicorns represent. They sing in chorus, to a haunting tune:

*We never went away; you always knew that we were here;
Remember how to look for us: you’ll find we were always here.*

Perhaps the Lord is telling us the same. Remember how to look for him. You’ll find he was always here. Amen.