

Jesus's Three Step Recipe for Life

Debbie Stockdale, October 11, 2020 This morning we are celebrating Thanksgiving in a world we couldn't have imagined last Thanksgiving. And yet, here we are, lifting up our thankful hearts together in praise. So many things have changed but more have stayed the same. The trees with their lovely golden leaves, the squirrels chasing through the trees, the gorgeous sunrises, food on our tables, smiles as we pass people when we are out walking – these things are the same. There are so many things to be thankful for!

I will admit though, that the changes brought with Covid 19 are tough to take – our extended family is not gathering together to share turkey together this year, I'm not seeing my little grand-niece nearly as often as I'd like except in videos and photos, and my hug meter is a little low as we are now asked to keep our distance from all except those living with us. On top of that, the news brings many worrying things to light every day. So how are we to live through these challenging times? How are we to live in gratitude for all our blessings when there are so many things to worry about?

Let's look to the wisdom offered in our story for the day. Jesus tells us: *So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today. Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?*

Jesus teaches us to focus on today and not worry about tomorrow – today's trouble is enough for today. So true but easier said than done eh? This morning we are going to go a little deeper into the story and look at the three step recipe Jesus outlines to help us live a more centered and faithful life. The three steps are:

- 1) Don't worry.
- 2) Be in the moment. Notice the natural world all around us.
- 3) Strive to live as Jesus teaches.

Let's take a closer look at the first step: Do not worry.

That's a big one. I wonder how many of you are natural worriers? I am. I can find things to worry about in almost any situation. But worrying is not helpful. It simply saps our energy and keeps us stuck in unhappy places. I remember when I was going through cancer treatment many years ago. One day I was going over the many bad possible scenarios I was worried about with my oncologist. He said:

Worry is like sitting in a rocking chair. It keeps you moving but doesn't get you anywhere.

I'd never heard this little piece of traditional wisdom before then but it's stuck with me over the years. Worry running around in our heads saps our strength and prevents us from moving towards addressing the root of the worries. It leads us to focus on the negative possibilities rather than the positive ones. It's amazing the number of things I worry about that never, ever come into being. Don't worry is great advice. The trouble is that to stop worrying is hard. How can we worry less? Jesus offers a great strategy and it is step 2 of the recipe.

Part 2 Look at the birds of the air; consider the lilies of the field

What can we do when worry is consuming us? Consider the lilies. Look at the birds. Step into this particular moment. Jesus was teaching outside and using the things around himself as teaching tools. He invited the people to stop worrying, to lift their heads and look around. Stop worrying and be in this moment.

The simple action of stepping outside our heads and really paying attention to this particular moment will help us worry less. The lily doesn't worry. Why do we?

While most of us won't have a lily nearby to consider to help us interrupt the worry cycle going round in our heads, there is always something to see or touch, something to concentrate on when we stop to look around us.

There is a simple five step activity based on our five senses that can interrupt a spike in worry and anxiety that is based on this simple principle. It helps us to focus on the here and now rather than some unknown future issue. Let's do it together now.

First: pay attention to your breathing. Take 2 or 3 slow, deep, long breaths. Now:

- Look around and notice **FIVE** things you see around you. It could be a tree you see out the window, a bit of dust floating in the air, anything in your surroundings.
- What are **FOUR** things you can touch around you. It could be your hair, a couch you are sitting on, or the ground under your feet.
- Listen, what are **THREE** things you hear. This could be any external sound. If you can hear your belly rumbling that counts! Focus on things you can hear.
- What are **TWO** things you can smell. Maybe the coffee you brewed this morning. Maybe the lotion you used. What can you smell?
- What is **ONE** thing you can taste. What does the inside of your mouth taste like—coffee, cereal from breakfast?

Simply paying attention to our surroundings in a specific and focused way can get help get our anxiety under control. Pay attention to this particular moment and ground yourself in the here and now, not in some unknown future that may or may not come to be. This is a simple practice that can be done anytime and anywhere. It is easy to remember, based on our 5 amazing senses:

5 things we see, 4 things we can touch, 3 things we can hear, 2 things we can smell and 1 thing we can taste. It is a simple tool to help us get out of the worrying habit.

The other part of consider the lilies lies in really appreciating our surroundings and the natural world we are part of – appreciating all the blessings we are surrounded with every day. If we increase the time we spend in gratitude, we lift our spirits and decrease the time we spend worrying. Who of us can consider the lilies or watch the birds or the sky and not be captivated by the gifts of creation?

Take the time to really look at them. See the ant that is crawling up the stem of the lily. Touch the petals and feel their velvety, sumptuous texture. Smell their intoxicating scent. Think about the amazing way the plant can convert CO₂ into O₂. Focus on the lily and see the variations in the colours and the tiny details of how it is made. It is miraculous. Consider the lilies.

Mary Oliver, one of my favorite poets, says this in her poem called Messenger:

My work is loving the world.

*Here the sunflowers, there the hummingbird—
equal seekers of sweetness.*

Here the quickening yeast; there the blue plums.

Here the clam deep in the speckled sand.

Are my boots old? Is my coat torn?

*Am I no longer young, and still half-perfect? Let me
keep my mind on what matters,
which is my work,*

*which is mostly standing still and learning to be
astonished.*

The phoebe, the delphinium.

The sheep in the pasture, and the pasture.

Which is mostly rejoicing, since all the ingredients are here,

*which is gratitude, to be given a mind and a heart
and these body-clothes,*

*a mouth with which to give shouts of joy
to the moth and the wren, to the sleepy dug-up clam,
telling them all, over and over, how it is
that we live forever.*

~ “Messenger” by Mary Oliver, from Thirst

Mary Oliver practices thankful, praiseful living.

Notice your blessings and send your thanks winging into the universe as praise to the Holy, to our God. That is the perfect antidote to worrying.

So, let’s review our recipe for living so far:

Step one – don’t worry. Step two – be in the moment, notice and give thanks for our blessings. Now, here is the final step:

Step 3: strive first for the kingdom of God and God’s righteousness

Strive for the kingdom of God simply means to take an active part in making the world a better place, a just place, a loving place for all. It means sharing God’s love with others. Replace some of that time we spend worrying with doing our part to make the world reflect the vision of Jesus by loving our neighbour, our God and ourselves.

What can you do in this moment in time to help someone? Is there someone you can call and brighten their day? Is there a card you can send? Is there a prayer you can say?

What can you do to make this world a more just and loving place? Is there an idea you have about a project we could do together as St. David’s church family to reach out and help those who are in need in this moment? Perhaps you have a creative idea looking ahead to Christmas in these Covid times that would spread love and light that we can work together on?

Is there something you are called to speak out about – an injustice that needs to be addressed? Is there a letter you could write or a petition to sign? Have you noticed something in the way we are church together that we can change to make ourselves more welcoming of diversity?

God gave us this wonderful, abundant planet in this amazing universe that supports an astounding diversity of life. What action can we take to care for it and its inhabitants in some way.

When we reach out in love to help others, miraculously, all our own troubles seem less.

Strive first for the kingdom of God and God’s righteousness, and it will help our worries too.

So - What are the 3 steps in Jesus' recipe for living?

- 1) Don't worry.
- 2) Be in the moment. Notice the natural world all around us.
- 3) Strive to live as Jesus teaches.

I invite you to take these 3 steps home with you this Thanksgiving morning. As Jesus says; *Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?* Our hearts will be lighter and our smiles will come easier if we can give up the worry habit, live in the moment with grateful hearts and reach out in love to help others!

That is the way to build God's kingdom right here, right now.

Amen!