

Do you remember Bobby McFerrin's 1988 hit, Don't Worry Be Happy? Let me apologise now for calling that to mind because I know that some of you will now be plagued by the inane melody of that acapella hit for the rest of the day!

And believe me I am not suggesting that this is today's Gospel in a nutshell! Not worrying = happiness because I don't believe things to be that simple, it seems bizarre then that when hurricane Gilbert hit Jamaica the week after this song was released, it apparently became something of an unofficial anthem.

My aunt and her family were amongst hundreds who lost their homes and their businesses in that hurricane, everything they had worked for. There are so many in the same situation today. Think for a moment of those who have lost everything they have worked for in the recent floods, in the volcanic eruption in Indonesia, in the violence in South Sudan and Syria; just some of the hundreds of thousands of people displaced by war or want.

I'm not saying 'count yourself lucky with your relatively insignificant first world worries, your situation could be much worse'; what I am saying is that it seems to me that we human beings are actually amazingly resilient when it comes to facing massive and life changing challenges; time and again what we find amidst terrible tragedy are compelling accounts of resurrection. It isn't disaster striking that confounds us, but rather it is the irrational fear of what might, possibly, one day happen that all too often cripples us.

Its easy to see anxiety as a particularly modern plague, the statistics seem to support this view, 40% or all absence from work is stress related, in this country more than 45 million prescriptions are written out annually for antidepressants and tranquillisers. Many of us here this morning know only too well what worry can do to us, we are literally sick with it. But the Gospel reading tells us that this is nothing new.

Yes I am sure that the scale of the problem has increased, and I am also sure, but I haven't looked at the research, that there is probably a correlation between relative wealth and anxiety. The more we have to lose the more we worry about losing, our status, our position, etc. etc.; and given the economic situation and the fragility of any country's, let alone individual's, position in a global, technology driven market being as it is, it's a wonder any of us can sleep at night.

But we can I guess, to the extent that we understand the message in the Gospel, worrying about the future won't change it. But that is only half the message of the Gospel.

Worry isn't the most helpful word here because I don't think Jesus is just talking to worriers, he's talking to the control freaks too, and that is more or less every one of us here.

We do have some Holy people in our midst, I see some truly wonderful acts of instinctive selfless generosity - but most of us, me included, are most of the time overly preoccupied with securing our own, or our loved ones future comfort. What's wrong with that you might well ask, isn't providing for those who depend upon us not only necessary but good, responsible, honourable?

Well it might make good sense, but having our focus on ourselves or our own will not change the world, and to cap it all, Jesus says that it demonstrates a lack of faith in God's ability and willingness to provide for all our needs, it is the gentiles who strive for such security because they have no faith in Gods providence.

This is not easy reading, if any of you find the Gospel easy to read, then I would politely suggest that you are probably reading it with your fingers in your ears. Yes, if we have taken on responsibilities then we have duties to fulfil, but if we call ourselves Christians, and if we sincerely wish to follow Christ, then our foremost duty is this.

Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

Our focus must be on the kingdom of God, in first place, before concern for securing our own future not because it is unGodly to do that, but because it isn't where true peace of mind and lasting security are to be found, for you or me or anyone else. Disasters happen, and even if we are lucky enough to avoid disaster, what impact has our building a protective shield around ourselves or our own had on those less able to provide for themselves?

If however we focus our efforts primarily and consistently on promoting justice and peace, for reconciliation and forgiveness, to build trust and respect; if we are truly generous with what we have, not giving from what is left over when we have had enough, but sharing with a true sense of being blessed and being a blessing, this promotes a communal security, that begins perhaps to look something like heaven on earth.

The Gospel is not asking us to be recklessly irresponsible with regard to our own or our loved ones needs, but to understand that at a fundamental rather than superficial level, our moral, physical, spiritual well-being is intrinsically linked to the well-being of the whole of creation.

Our first reading reminds us that God has in creation provided in abundance but all too often we prefer to trust in our own strength and personal goals and achievements rather than relying on God's purposes and love for us, God's providence, mercy and grace.

St Paul in his letter to the Romans acknowledges the distress that we experience as the creation waits with eager longing, groaning in the pains of labour. But that struggle is the struggle for new life, a new creation. We have been saved in hope he says, some thing has been accomplished but is yet to be fulfilled and that fulfilment comes when we are willing to strive not individually and for ourselves, but together and for the outcast, the prisoner, the hungry, the lonely.

What is your main worry today, what can that reveal to you about your faith and trust in God, and in others; what does it tell you about your view of the community in which we live or the world around us.

God saw everything that he had made and indeed it was very good.

This week I have been trying to take it easy, that doesn't come easily for me and that is not a good thing, it is a failing. But when I have managed to do as I'm told, I have watched the sunrise, and the birds feeding, and the flowers stretching their necks out into the sun, and one person reaching out in love to another, and it does make you wonder, what am I striving for. Not because I have concluded that I am engaged in pointless activity - far from it - but because it is always worth being mindful of what we are doing and why we are doing it, asking ourselves what are we aiming to achieve by doing this or that, and who is it for?

Worrying is future focussed, but the future is not something we can control, it is in God's hands, who do we think we are! Our task is to focus on today's troubles, the need before us, and around us. Putting first things first, to build a community of love in which we reflect and recognise the image of the living God.