

## “Not Anxious”

1. There is a song which was very popular many years ago which pops up here and there yet today
  - a. It’s called “Don’t Worry, Be Happy” by Bobby McFerrin
  - b. (and sorry about giving you this ear-worm)
  - c. In 1989 it won three Grammys: Song of the Year, Record of the Year, and Best Male Pop Vocal Performance.
  - d. It’s a catchy reggae tune performed entirely a cappella by Bobby McFerrin, who in fact sings all the different parts in the song, including all the “instrumental” parts which he performed using his voice. He’s a very talented musician
  - e. You may even recall the music video which featured McFerrin as well as Robin Williams.
  - f. McFerrin got the title from the teaching of Maher Baba, an Indian mystic teacher popular in the 50s and 60s.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Don%27t\\_Worry,\\_Be\\_Happy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Don%27t_Worry,_Be_Happy)
  - g. In the song McFerrin dispenses wisdom like this
    - i. In every life we have some trouble
    - ii. But when you worry, you make it double
    - iii. Don't worry, be happy
  - h. Sounds simple enough, right? If only it were.
2. The Gospel passage from today, which comes, like the passage from last Sunday, from the Sermon on the Mount, presents Jesus giving what may sound initially like a message close to McFerrin’s song.
  - a. The gospel line is this: “be not anxious about your life...” because, paraphrasing Jesus, God is going to provide for you.
  - b. But this line comes towards the end of our passage today.
  - c. The passage actually begins with talk about money.
    - i. Jesus’ message offers a contrast.
    - ii. It first presents humans who want to be smart, good stewards, and who want to provide for themselves and their families.
    - iii. But Jesus criticizes them. And this might feel confusing.
    - iv. It’s the middle part of this passage which clarifies the first.
    - v. In the middle, Jesus says: people can’t serve two masters, which Jesus names as either serving God or serving wealth.

- vi. Perhaps more succinctly: you can't be being primarily motivated by wealth and by God.
  - vii. The first thing to notice here is that Jesus is unmasking an idol
  - viii. Because we humans can argue that money is really just a tool which we use, but Jesus is widening the view to make us realize that money can become the kind of priority which ends up sweeping away all other priorities
  - ix. It becomes our master, Jesus is cautioning.
  - x. And when that happens, it's then impossible to even pretend God is our God.
  - xi. It sounds harsh, perhaps. And we may push on the implications.
  - xii. But going back to the first set of statements, we see what Jesus is talking about.
  - xiii. Be aware of where you invest your time, efforts, and yes money, because it is possible to invest ourselves in material and temporary things, all the while neglecting our investment in the spiritual and eternal things.
- d. Now, a sermon is a theological statement and not investment advice.
- i. I don't think Jesus is arguing for people not to have a 401k or home insurance.
  - ii. Instead, he is teaching that a focus on money can make us have a false sense of autonomy and security, like we're masters of our own destiny, that we are independent from others (and from God), and that we can avoid any possible need if only we do the right kind of planning.
  - iii. But it's an illusion, Jesus is saying, for us to think we're masters of our own destiny when in fact we could be letting money become our master.
  - iv. The implication is that we humans want to do for ourselves, to be fully independent – and while being agents of our own life is clearly important, the failure comes when we don't let God be the agent of change in us.
- e. It's right about now when the members of the Stewardship and Finance Committee are shifting uncomfortably in the pews.
- i. We are, after all, in the midst of a Stewardship Campaign looking ahead at 2024 and inviting the congregation to promise its support for the campaign.
  - ii. The committee is probably wondering just where this sermon is heading...

- f. So if the first part of the passage is asking us to watch where we invest ourselves, and the middle part reminds us we can't serve God and money, the last part clarifies the entire message by saying something McFerrin could have written a song about: Don't worry, trust God.
    - i. It's not that money or planning are evil.
    - ii. It's not that Jesus condemns anxiety either.
    - iii. Jesus makes the case that, when our trust is first and foremost in God, then the concern or even anxiety we may feel at the unknown future is softened by trusting in a God who looks out for us, the same God who looks out for the birds of the air
    - iv. One scholar translates "don't be anxious" as "don't be overly concerned" , which again conveys a sense of perspective.
    - v. In the final analysis it's about rooting ourselves in the trust of God in plenty and in want.
    - vi. Don't worry, trust God.
  - g. So, in the context of our stewardship campaign looking at 2024, our focus is trusting God looks out for us, blesses efforts aligned with God, and equips us for what's ahead.
3. Growing up, it seemed we couldn't speak about the future without invoking God
- a. In my family there was hardly ever a statement of planning or the future which didn't end with the equivalent of "God willing" "Si Dios quiere"
    - i. Whether it was a small thing (we're going to visit relatives for Christmas break) or a big thing (I hope that medical test shows a good result), we always would say at the end "Si Dios quiere"
    - ii. Those words didn't erase the anticipation or concern, but they reminded us that our whole life is in God's hands.
    - iii. Si Dios quiere, if God wants it to be so, is a way of affirming that our plans are secondary to God's purposes.
    - iv. It also had a way of distilling our faith into a simple phrase which reflected trust that God would act to supply our needs and bless us, God willing.
  - b. That kind of framing of faith and trust is good to highlight today, Reformation Sunday
    - i. As a reminder, the Church Reformation took place in Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, and it is the theological and ecclesial movement which led to a break with the Roman Catholic tradition and to the birth of the Lutheran Church and the Presbyterian Church, among others.

- ii. It had as one of its key elements the notion of stripping back layers of tradition and interpretation and getting back to the Scriptures themselves, back to basics.
- iii. One way in which those basics were proclaimed was by a series of statements about the basic nature of faith, the things that alone represent our faith. We trust...
  - 1. In Scripture alone
  - 2. In Christ alone
  - 3. In faith alone
  - 4. in grace alone
  - 5. and give glory to God alone.

[https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-five-solas/#:~:text=The%20five%20solas%20of%20the,\(glory%20to%20God%20alone\).](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-five-solas/#:~:text=The%20five%20solas%20of%20the,(glory%20to%20God%20alone).)
- c. Seen through that lens, Jesus is teaching for us to Trust in God alone
  - i. Not to let anything distract us from that trust
  - ii. Or lure us into trusting something more than God
- 4. When you look up and see birds flying freely, maybe heading south for the winter, remember the lessons they teach us. God looks after them, and so God looks after us. Focus your energies, therefore, on trusting God and aligning our behavior to God's priorities. That's getting down to basics. That's about drawing closer and closer to God. Don't be overly concerned: trust God.

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/eighth-sunday-after-epiphany/commentary-on-matthew-624-34>

#### Reflection questions

1. Share a story of when you found it difficult to lay aside your concerns in order to trust God in a situation.
2. In today's portion of the sermon on the mount, we hear that we cannot serve God and wealth (Matthew 6:19–27). What other things try to take over the role of God in our lives?
3. Who have been role models for you of trust in God? How did they show their trust in God in anxious times?