

See how the lilies of the field grow.

'I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these.'

I think we see something of what Jesus meant as we look around the church today at the splendour of the flowers and the magnificent arrangements that have been created with them – there is no better Bible verse for a day like today:

*See how the lilies of the field grow. I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these - what stunning beauty, what incredible creation, what complete perfection - what an illustration of God's good creation – his creation of this whole world that we live our lives in – we understand what that last verse of the creation story in Genesis 1 is saying: *God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.**

But alas - we know that life in the world, that God made so good, isn't always very good – it isn't good at all sometimes – and there is no point saying otherwise. Therefore it is interesting and important for us to notice that when Jesus draws our attention to the splendour and beauty of the flowers, he does so in the context of talking about anxiety and stress and worry in our lives.

vs. 25 *I tell you, do not worry about your life.*

vs. 31 *So do not worry.*

vs. 34 *Therefore do not worry about tomorrow.*

Don't worry – some hope!

- Some people are 'born worriers – they can't help it – it's just the way they are made.

- And some people 'don't have their sorrows to seek' – they have plenty of things in their lives that would make anybody worry, and they often seem to cope better than most of us would.

- Maybe there are even some people who could do with worrying a wee bit more about things. They just seem to have far too much of a 'happy go luck' approach to life, and they never seem to think much about the big questions or the hard possibilities of life.

So as the Flower Festival draws our attention to this verse where Jesus ‘waxed lyrical’ about the lilies of the field, it give us a good opportunity to think about just what he meant when he said, *Don’t worry!*

Maybe the first thing that we should say is that:

(1) The Bible is full of Worriers.

And I find that helpful. If they were worriers, there’s hope for us! When we come to a part of the Bible that we can’t understand immediately or easily – like this part where Jesus tells us not to worry – it is helpful to think about what the whole Bible tells us about worrying – for that will help us to understand this part - all of the Bible helps us to understand all the individual parts of the Bible – Scripture explains and illuminates Scripture.

So it is for us with this verse where Jesus tells us not to worry. When we think about the whole Bible we find that it is full of Worriers – people who had all sorts of worries, even people of strong faith – just as people now have all sorts of things that cause them to worry and be anxious. It’s often hard not to worry – there is plenty that can cause us to worry about ourselves, and there’s plenty to make us worry about our families and friends. We can so easily and so understandably worry about health matters and illness; about all sorts of accidents that can happen; about difficult situations that arise in our work; about the fact that so many people are the victims of violent crime; about the awful evil that we are sometimes aware is not too far below the surface in our own country, and that we have seen in horrifying form on all sides in the Iraq situation – By gum, having seen the things that happen there, if I had to go to Iraq, I think I would be worried!

Who of us could honestly say that we don’t worry about anything – at least sometimes – that we never feel a bit under stress, that we never loose some sleep over something?

So, in a strange kind of way, I find it helpful to remind myself that the Bible is full of worriers! Let me mention one or two of them.

- Moses who was worried stiff about having to speak to Pharaoh.

- The man who came after Moses was Joshua, and as he began to lead the people, God needed to say to him, more than once: *Joshua: Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged ...*

- Or what about these words in Ps. 42 & 43? Are these not the words of a man who was feeling worried: *Why are you cast down O my soul, Why so disturbed within me?*

- And we could go on and on – we can't possibly miss the fact that the Bible is full of worriers – listen to Paul, one of the very greatest men of faith in the NT, as he speaks frankly about how he had felt at times: *We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life.*

- And Jesus, himself, as he faced the Cross in Gethsemane, *being in anguish ... and his sweat was like drops of blood.* If that's not another way of talking about terrible worry and fear, I don't know what it is!

So my point at the moment is that when we experience worry and anxiety about situations in our lives, we do not need to feel that it is only people like us who worry – that it must be a sign of very poor faith. The Bible is full of worriers – so we are in good company – we can almost take heart – those people of faith worried, so it's not just so bad that we worry!

There is a very real sense in which worry is a natural part of our humanness – it's an expression of our love for life and our love for others around us in life. There would be something wrong, in a way, if we did not care enough to worry. Worry goes with the territory of being a person created by God, with something of God's loving concern for people and situations around us in life. It is precisely because life and people matter to God, and matter to us, that we often worry.

So, therefore, when we come to these words of Jesus where he says, *Do not worry*, we know that he is getting at something slightly different – it's a different lesson that he wants us to understand and take on board.

And that brings us to the second point for today. The Bible full of Worriers, but, in sections like today's reading, it is full of Warnings: **This passage is full of Warnings.**

Especially, warnings about one particular kind of worry - the worst sort of worry – the most dangerous sort of worry – the kind of worry that we need to watch out for like a hawk – the worry that Jesus had in his mind when he said: *I tell you, Do not worry.*

The worry that Jesus meant is the worry that is self-centred and things-centred: *Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink or about your body, what you will wear.*

Jesus' warning about worry is to do with always **wanting 'the more'** and **'the material'** – the danger of our lives becoming dominated and directed by what we have and would still like to have.

And, we almost certainly know that this is a very real danger – that we live in an age of high living standards and ever higher aspirations and expectations – that it is really very difficult to be wise about the pressures of always want more and always wanting better – that sub-consciously we often think that more is always better, and new is always superior to old.

Do we not often make the mistake, even though we know it is foolish, of feeling that our bank balance and our investments are our ultimate safety net and security in life.

Please tell me if I'm wrong – but do we not all experience these pressures? Is Jesus not correct in identifying them as one of the great realities of life? Is his warning not close to the mark?

Now, we need to be clear that Jesus is not talking about working hard to support and provide for our families – being diligent and prudent, and looking ahead – the rest of the Bible makes it clear that these are good things. I came across a wonderfully amusing quotation about this the other day from Martin Luther, the great Reformation figure. He was a master at expressing important Christian points in very down-to-earth language. So as he wrote about the rightness of people working hard to provide for

themselves and their families, he said: *God wants nothing to do with the lazy, gluttonous bellies who are neither concerned nor busy; they act as if they just had to wait for him to drop a roasted goose into their mouths!*

Nor do Jesus' words apply so much to the person in the Christian Aid/Tear Fund scenario- the people who often doesn't know where the next meal is coming from.

Rather, Jesus' warning applies to us and to all who have plenty, but are often in danger of wanting ever more. It's not so often the person who has very little who worries the most, but the person who has lots!

Therefore Jesus warns us – that in rightly enjoying and appreciating all that we have in material terms – and all of that is part of God's good creation – of which the floral arrangements are just a reminder – we need to be very careful that we don't become dominated by this part of life – not satisfied with what we have – full of anxiety and worry.

Is he not right – isn't much of the stress and pressure of modern life closely linked to the material side of our lives – work, careers, financial security and prospects – All very important, but sometimes we think so much about these things that our lives are invaded and occupied by worry.

It mustn't be a new phenomenon – listen to Ps. 39:6

Man ...bustles about, but only in vain; he heaps up wealth, not knowing who will get it.

Do we recognise anything of ourselves in these warnings – do we recognise our busy, pressurised world, where it is often very difficult to do anything about the pressure? Do we recognise our own hectic, stressful lives where we sometimes create the pressure?

Maybe we do need to heed Jesus' warnings – which are a clear reminder of so many Bible warnings: *Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink or about your body, what you will wear.*

After all, as Jesus insisted, *Who...can add a single hour to his life by worrying* – but, as one of the commentators on this passage

says, by the excessive worry and stress of our modern lives, we can certainly shorten our lives. It's an incredibly contemporary application.

So it is this worry that comes from 'the more' and 'the material' that Jesus is talking about.

(1)The Bible is full of worriers, and (2) this section is full of warnings, but finally, and thankfully:

(3) In these verses, Jesus gives Wisdom for Worriers.

As Jesus talks about the beauty and the splendour of 'the lilies of the field', he gives us a wisdom for dealing with the worries of our lives. I want to finish by trying to pick these out for myself, and hopefully for you also.

Here are some pointers which should help us whether we are thinking about the many potentially worrying realities of our lives, where worry is very understandable – or whether we are thinking about the materialistic worry of which Jesus has just warned us. Here is wisdom to help worriers.

A. Firstly, he reminds us, **Don't live as if you were on your own in life.**

Your heavenly Father knows is how Jesus puts it (32).

This is how Jesus speaks about God – the God whose creating wonder we see around us today in the flowers – the God, says Jesus, to whom the birds of the air matter, **and to whom people matter so much more: *Are you not much more valuable?*** –and, although he doesn't say it in so many words, Have you not experienced the love of a heavenly Father again and again in your life.

What an assurance to hear Jesus speak of God as '*our heavenly Father*' – who knows, who notices, who cares, who loves, who holds onto us, who is at work in the circumstances of our lives even when we cannot see or understand – to know that God is not just someone who might be away up there but doesn't take much interest in our lives down here – but rather, that he is '*our heavenly Father, that **People Matter to God.***

It is this assurance that is missing, says Jesus, from the lives of those who live as if they were on their own – the people whom he calls ‘*the pagans*’ – and by that he doesn’t necessarily mean people in some other part of the world giving their allegiance to some primitive religion – he means anybody, anywhere, who lives as if they were on their own in life – and there are plenty of people like that much closer to home.

There is a heavenly Father – he is the God and Father of Jesus whose words we are thinking about this morning – he is the one who knows and notices our lives, and to whom we matter.

It is when we ignore and forget him, and live the most of our lives without reference to him, that we really have cause to worry, and no-one to turn to. You probably know this little simple poem:

*Said the robin to the sparrow:
I should really like to know
Why these anxious human beings
Rush about and worry so.*

*Said the sparrow to the robin:
Friend, I think that it must be
That they have no heavenly Father,
Such as cares for you and me.*

The cares and worries of life don’t always go away – but they look a little different and we can cope better when we are not living as if we were on our own in life – when we remember and rejoice that we have a heavenly Father who knows and cares. As Peter wrote in his letter: *Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.*

B. Secondly, Jesus’ words remind us, **Don’t live as if there was no tomorrow.**

Vs. 30 *If this is how God clothes the grass of the field which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you?*

Jesus seems to hint very strongly that there is a ‘tomorrow’ for these lives of ours, whatever our circumstances today – and that we need to try to remember this when our lives feel tough and tired and anxious – that are different from the grass of the field. Indeed, that human beings are different from everything else, suggests Jesus – there is more to our lives than the ‘today’ and the immediate, and we need to try to realise it – especially when ‘today’ is hard and we are finding it difficult to get through, and we can’t see any hope on the horizon of life.

For you see, if we are stuck with thinking about life as if there is no real tomorrow, then anything that threatens our ‘today’ will be the source of the very greatest worry and we will not be able to deal with it at all.

Now, of course, as Christian people, we believe that there is a tomorrow – that God is the God who in the long term of things, works out everything for good – so that sufferings of the present are ultimately not worth comparing with the promise of the future. As Christian people, we trust in Jesus who spoke of hope and the future in terms of resurrection and life, and a Father’s house.

But we are inclined to find it so hard – so very hard – to hold unto this Christian hope – we need to keep reminding ourselves about it – we need to keep translating the words of Christian hope into the reality of our own lives – so that we don’t live as if there was no tomorrow – reminding ourselves, as C.S. Lewis did – maybe you watched Nuala McKeever’s TV programme about him the other night – that no matter how much we love today and enjoy every single part of today’s living – that this is only ‘shadowlands’ – the best is yet to come.

(Don’t live as if you were on your own; Don’t live as if there was no tomorrow, and finally:)

C. Finally, Jesus reminds us, **Don’t live as if life was just your own kingdom.**

Vs.33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Isn't this a remarkable piece of advice – that we will be happier and more content, and better able to cope with our lives, including all their stresses and strains, if we can only understand that our own lives are not the most important part of the picture.

Don't ask me to think about anything or anybody else, we often feel – even if we don't actually say it – but Jesus tells us to think firstly about God's kingdom, and allow our own lives to fit into that bigger picture – and then we will be on the right road for coping with life, stresses and strains included.

How I need to learn this lesson over and over again – to know and remember that my life is right, and is only right, when my trust is in Jesus and my way of thinking about life ordered accordingly, and my practical priorities determined by that..

How I need to keep on renewing and refocusing my trust in the heavenly Father in whom the Bible worriers trusted:

Is. 26:3 You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast because he trusts in you.

Phil.4:4& 7 Rejoice in the Lord always ...and the peace of God which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds.

And the words of Jesus surely tops them all: John 14: 27 *My peace I give unto you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*

Jesus invites us, encourages us, to live life in his kingdom – and there he promises us his peace for the very real worries of our lives.

And as we live life in his kingdom, we will be able to enjoy all the good things of life in his creation, without being taken over by them.

And further, I think that it is when we live within his kingdom that we will be of some help to others, with the worries of their lives.

So, therefore, we need to keep coming back to this focus – his Kingdom – for we get distracted too easily and too often.

And, if we have never quite taken that step into 'his kingdom' by placing our trust in Jesus Christ, we need to do so.

C.S. Lewis, called the story of his coming to faith '*Surprised by Joy*' – he didn't mean that life suddenly became one 'long breeze' – rather, by 'joy', he meant that into his life came a sense of security and safety; a reconciling of the things in his past that gnawed away at him; a contentment in the present, and a sure and certain hope for the future – this was his joy as he came into faith in Jesus and committed his life to the kingdom of God.

And this surely the bottom line for us, as we think about worry – it will always be with us – but wisdom is to;

- i) Make sure that we aren't living as if we were on our own in life.
- ii) Take sure that we aren't living as if there was no tomorrow.
- iii) Make sure that we aren't living as if life was just about our own kingdom.

I tell you, Do not worry See how the lilies of the field grow not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these.