

St Marc, Grenoble  
Sunday 12th February 2023 (2nd before Lent)  
Genesis 1: 1 - 2: 3  
Psalm 136  
Matthew 6: 25 - 34  
**'Created by God'**

Good morning everyone, those here in church, and those of you joining on Zoom; it is a joy to worship with you. Let's Pray ...

As usual, before I start my reflection, I'd like to hear what you noticed in this morning's readings. The lovely creation narrative, which is a very long reading, (Well done Veronica!) and the reading from Matthew, which is part of what we call the 'Sermon on the Mount'? What did you notice, what jumped out, what struck you??

Some of you will have noticed the morning readings I sent out on Whatsapp this week were all from Genesis, partly because I feel they are well worth careful reading, but also because this morning I really want to focus more on the reading from Matthew. This passage is a small part of what we call Jesus' 'Sermon on the Mount', which is in effect a comprehensive 'Guide to Christian Living'.

Jesus' comments may sound a bit strange: 'Don't worry about your life, don't worry about what to eat, or about what to drink'. (Let me emphasise, Jesus did NOT say be careless with your lives!) He was saying: 'Don't worry about your life's needs' and in these very troubled times those words are important and very reassuring.

What do you worry about? So often we worry about things we can do nothing about, we have to learn to offer those concerns to God and trust Him to sort them out.

Too often we get stressed over unimportant things. Jesus says: 'Don't worry about your life – what to eat, what to drink; don't worry about your body, what to wear. (That's been a concern for humans since Adam and Eve first realised they were naked - it was really only human sin, which created the need for clothes.)

But we must be careful, 'don't worry' is not the same as 'don't care'. Jesus doesn't mean we should stop eating, or stop wearing decent clothes; but, it's most important that we don't allow unnecessary desires to rule our lives - especially in these times when social media tries to tell us otherwise.

We shouldn't let food or drink, clothes, cars, or phones or computers become idols, which take over how we live, and rule our lives. We must remember God will give us everything we need - but that's not the same as 'everything we think we want, or what social media tells us we should desire.'

It was very different for the people in 1st C Judea, many of whom were subsistence farmers, dependent on what they could grow to feed themselves and their families. With any excess to share, or exchange for other goods, or crops. If their harvest failed, hunger became a harsher reality.

Someone, in another church I have connections with, tweeted this week that the people in Southern Turkey and Northern Syria would find these words very hard to accept just now, but that's when the actions and prayers of the wider church are so vital. Remember Jesus said 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind;' then He said: 'And love your neighbour as yourself'. So we have a duty to reach out to people in such desperate and palpable need

Yet, Jesus said 'Don't worry – don't preoccupy yourselves, don't be anxious.' Easier said than done if you were facing the reality of nothing to eat tomorrow, or nothing to keep you sheltered and warm, when you are cold tonight.

'Don't be anxious,' Jesus said, 'because God – your heavenly Father knows what you need; and you only have to look at the birds and the flowers to see His wonderful provision for all His beautiful creation.'

Jesus explained, in vv. 32 and 33, that more important than wasting time worrying about food, drink and clothing, is to spend our time putting God's way of life first - and that includes loving our neighbour as ourselves.

'Don't worry' is not the same as 'Don't pray and don't plan'. Worrying about tomorrow is time and energy wasted, but praying and planning for tomorrow is time well spent.

How do we define the difference?? Careful planning is about praying first, thinking ahead about our steps along the way – trusting our life to God and being open to His guidance and His leading.

By contrast, worry consumes the worrier with fear and disables our ability to trust God. Worry means our plans interfere with our relationship with God and that stops us being open to His perfect plan for our lives.

Life is a bit like exams; there's no point in asking God to help you pass your exams, if you haven't worked in preparation. But if you've put the work in, then God can help you relax, have a clear mind and be able to recall everything you've learned.

In the same way, trusting God to provide for our needs doesn't mean we don't have to work, or even that we shouldn't own anything. What's important is that our life doesn't revolve around these material things, they shouldn't be our priority.

Instead, we're told to make the growth of God's kingdom our priority; and, if we get our priorities right, He will enable everything else to 'fall into place'.

As He calls us to live the Christian life, God invites us to use the gifts He's given us to the full, and share them with those less fortunate than ourselves. If we share what we have, God's kingdom will grow, and our gifts will be fully used.

Incidentally, it's also worth thinking along those lines, as we review our regular Christian giving. We need to remember everything we have, the money we've earned, and the things we prize, come from God. They are what God has blessed us with for our needs and to share for His work.

I mentioned last week that our regular giving is very important to the work of our church, so we need to review it regularly. In a couple of weeks' time Allwell, our treasurer, will be sharing our financial situation and our budget for this year - so that you will be able to see more clearly how important your giving is.

Finally, it is really on my heart to say something about joy, which is the opposite of worry. If we get our lives right and live 'Jesus' Way', we will begin to experience the complete and deep joy we see in Jesus' life. It doesn't mean we should all go around with silly grins on our faces, but it does mean whatever life, or the world, throws at us we can continue to rest in the inner peace, which God provides. Jesus encourages us to do what's right, in the midst of everything or everyone else going wrong or going their own way.

The past is behind us – it is the future that counts! If you are struggling to deal with life just now, if you're bereft, or lost, or lonely, remember Jesus died and rose again for you - and He is here for you, whatever your situation.

If you're concerned about work, or lack of it; if you are struggling with a sick body, or a sick mind, if you have concerns for a loved one or some other difficult situation ... If you are carrying a heavy load, don't worry - entrust it to God.

Share your concerns with the Lord. He knows about it, trust Him. He loves you and wants to shine His love into your life. Invite Him in, and He will lift your burden. Jesus says: 'Are you having a real struggle? Come to me! Are you carrying a big load on your back? Come to me – I'll give you a rest! Pick up my yoke and put it on; take lessons from me! My heart is gentle, not arrogant. You'll find the rest you deeply need. My yoke is easy to wear, my load is easy to bear.' (Matthew 11:28, 29)

If you're troubled or burdened today, as you come to communion, leave your troubles at the foot of the cross. That is where Jesus broke down the barrier between us and God, and took our burdens on Himself.

This celebration of Holy Communion is your chance to come to Him and let Him take the weight of your struggles on His shoulders!

So now: Let's pray and ask the Holy Spirit to help us stop worrying and help us to use our lives for the glory of God ... Amen