

Sermon 18 October 2009

Subject: Sermon on the mount (Matthew 6,25-34), Do not worry!

Dear Parishioners

The other day – and I'm telling you a true story now – when I was on my way to work, the tube driver sang through the loudspeaker the famous song: "Don't worry, be happy, ouhhhouhh". I'm sure all of you know this classic song by Bobby McFerrin and you remember the famous ouhhhouhhhouhhh. It's a great song, which is capable of putting you in a completely new mood and it brings a smile to your face. Let me just have a look now if you are already smiling as you remember the song having the melody of it in your head. I found it quite remarkable that the tube driver sang through the loudspeakers that day, I don't know how many of you have ever experienced such a situation. And it was also remarkable how we all reacted to it: Of course we started smiling and all those people on the tube usually trying to avoid the other people's glance looked at each other and I felt as if we had something in common. I was wondering what do all those different people have in common? I think it is that we all worry way too much and many of us take everything quite seriously, especially when on the train to work. And all of a sudden there is someone who reminds us that there is no need for this, but that we shouldn't worry instead we should be happy! As there are actually many reasons to be cheerful and to enjoy life. Many things in our lives work brilliantly and there are lots of reasons to smile. But isn't it difficult to remember this, especially on a normal hectic day?

I don't know if Bobby McFerrin was aware that he was actually quoting the Bible when he composed his song. Maybe he wasn't but I realised it when I was reading Matthew chapter 6, where it says:

34Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

So this Bible passage basically tells us not to worry, but to be happy on every single day of our lives, in order to enjoy our lives, as it is short enough! I don't know how you feel about it, but to me this sounds great and it seems that it is telling us a real truth about life. But – and there is unfortunately a but – it is for me quite

challenging to live according to it, if I am very honest. I don't know about you but I worry a lot, probably every day at least 20 times – of course I have never actually counted it. At the moment I worry a lot about the Swiss Church: Will the building be ready for the Opening Event on the 14/15 November? How will the builders manage to do their work properly when they have to hurry to finish in time? Will the Opening Event be attended by many people and will it be a success? Will we manage to organise everything so well that the event runs smoothly and will we find enough volunteers to help us? What will the decoration look like and will the chairs fit into the whole church building?

You see there are lots of things to worry about... I could make now a long list of things I worry about, including some more personal matters, but I don't want to spoil the good mood that we were in at the beginning of the sermon when we remembered the song "Don't worry be happy".

So there is a dilemma: On one hand we know that it is actually not worth worrying too much – on the other hand, we don't know how to stop it. And we all continue to worry about certain things in life. Every self-help book would probably now tell us that we just have to change our inner attitude towards certain problems that we carry with us and that this will slowly but steadily change our situation. Self-help books have the advantage that what they suggest usually sounds quite easy and simple to realise. Free according to the principle: Just a little bit every day and it helps... The Bible on the contrary is a bit more complicated than that. Still I would like to try and consider the Bible passage that we heard today as a kind of self-help instruction that will help us to improve our attitude towards things in our lives that we worry about. It might assist us to find some tips on how to handle this particular subject.

I always like to understand the reason that stands behind any advice. When I understand why I should react in a certain way, then it is easier for me to follow it. In verse 26 of chapter 6 Jesus gives us a reason, why we shouldn't worry too much. There it is written:

26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life^b?

28" And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that 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, O you of little faith?

Therefore one reason why we should not worry is the example of nature that surrounds us. Even though the birds and the lilies don't care about thinking of tomorrow and about organising their future, even though they don't save money to buy beautiful clothes or a great house, they still have everything that they need. It all works out fine for them. Whilst we human beings want to make sure that we have everything that we need, they just trust that everything will be provided for them. So we can learn something from all those creatures that survive without worrying. We learn that it is possible to exist without worrying. And we realize that we don't have to be greedy to make sure that we get enough but that we can trust in life and that we will receive everything that we need. I read the other day an interesting quote that said: "Greed is just a lack of trust". It seems to me that this is a very true statement.

This brings me to the next reason and that is the image of God that stands behind this picture of the lilies of the field and the birds of the air: It is the image of God the heavenly father - or if you prefer the picture of God the heavenly mother - who provides us with everything that we need. This is an image that I try to carry with me and that I try to bear in mind wherever I go. If I manage to trust in God's provision for my life then I don't have to worry too much about all those things that are like a heavy burden on my shoulder. It is an attitude of life to be aware of God the provider who is there for us, when we need him and who cares for us. Especially as a church we should really work on that and try our best to believe that God looks after our church and that it will all work out fine.

Maybe this sounds a bit too easy and possibly is quite unrealistic to believe in. As I mentioned before also for myself it is a real challenge to practise this wisdom from the Bible and to live according to it. Therefore I would never consider this as an absolute principle. There are of course situations where it is good that we worry about certain things. If we aren't concerned we would maybe become indifferent or we lose interest in everything or we might even become lazy. Therefore a certain amount of

worries can sometimes be exactly what we need. It is probably an art to find out which worries we should just try to let go and which ones are worth carrying with us for a little while. Not to forget that to worry is also an important part of human nature. Without being bothered about its future, mankind wouldn't have developed as much as it has.

Only if we feel that we are suffering from our thoughts and worries, should we take a step back to put everything into the right perspective. The Bible text helps us to see the situation in the right light as it reminds the reader to look away from himself and to instead focus his view on God.

In verse 25 it says:

25"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about *your* life, what you will eat or drink; or about *your* body, what you will wear.

The word "*your*" is strongly accentuated in the original Greek text, which shows that we are in danger of being too much concentrated on ourselves when we worry. And this is probably the danger of being caught up in sorrows and thoughts. Of course this doesn't help in any way and as it says in the sermon on the mount: It is not possible to make our lives any longer with those thoughts.

Therefore it is sometimes just good to smile and to sing: "Don't worry be happy" – it can only be for the best.

Amen