

PRAYER

Dear Lord, you are familiar with our worries and concerns. Will you help us today as we surrender these to you?

ACTIVITY/ICE BREAKER

What are you most worried about today?

VIDEO

Watch video 5: The penguin

READ

Luke 12: 22-33 (NIV) Then Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? “Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

REFLECTIONS

In this reading, Jesus encourages his followers not to worry about material things, but instead to focus on the kingdom of God. Not easy to do! We live in a world of material things. Christian activist Shane Claiborne says that we are all addicted to money, unable to survive without it. Jesus once said – ‘Where your treasure is there your heart will be too.’ Here Jesus encourages us to keep refocussing our concerns back on God. I wrote the following reading after reflecting on his words.

THE PENGUIN

‘Don’t worry...’ we are told.
If only.
But Jesus tells us more, offers us something else.
Go and find something green, he suggests.
Something that flies, or sings, or blossoms.
Something that drifts in the breeze.
Something that moves a little slowly.
Consider the robins, the skies, the worms, the daisies.
Birds do of course come a cropper,
And fall from the skies (Jesus tells us this),
And the grass withers and flowers fade...
But in going outside, or looking through glass,
To these things of creation,
To things, bigger, smaller, brighter, quirkier...
We lift our minds for a time,
Take them from our worries,
From the mess and chaos and uncertainty,
And offer them to our creator.
Jesus isn’t just saying,
‘Don’t think of the elephant in the room,’
But rather... ‘Ooh look! There’s a penguin!’
Offering us something else to fill our thoughts,
Something to help us focus our minds again on him.

THE PENGUIN

It seems to me that Jesus is not just saying think about the flowers or the birds, but rather go and look at them or something else in nature, as a way of reminding ourselves that everything is under God. We are part of a bigger picture. I sometimes give out jigsaw pieces to folk when I speak in church services, a physical reminder that we are all a unique and vital part of a bigger picture that God is putting together in this world. (Think about how it feels to finish a 1000 piece jigsaw only to find a couple of pieces missing. You and I are those vital pieces.)

Another reason for taking a moment to look at the beauty in creation, is that it reminds us how generous God is, and how precious is his world. Just think how popular David Attenborough's documentaries are. People are mesmerised by the size and wonder and detail in creation. The Psalms are full of invitations to pause in our days and reflect, a way of focussing back on God and calming our minds. 'The earth is the Lord's and everything in it,' Psalm 24 tells us, surely a reminder of the bigger picture. The writers of the Bible frequently remind us to think on the Creator and his view of things. The famous line from Psalm 46 verse 10 advises us to simply still ourselves from time to time, and know again the presence of God. I think Mary had captured some of this when she decided to anoint Jesus' feet. She had experienced the incredible work Jesus had done in her life and had managed to see beyond the here and now.

QUESTIONS

1. Which material things do you most worry about?
2. Have you known a time when focussing on God has helped with your worries?
3. How might looking for a 'penguin' help you to recentre yourself on God's generosity?
4. How might you capture some of Mary's generosity, as she anointed Jesus' feet?

PRAYER

Dear Lord, we thank you for your invitation to 'not to worry'. Help us as we navigate our way through our life and its up and downs and fill us with your Spirit who will lead us in all wisdom.