

Don't Worry, Be Holy
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Friends, I have to be honest with you. I am sort of counting the days until my kids are here and we all go on vacation together. In part, simply because I am really excited to see my critters after a three month break. Also, because vacations are just *wonderful* in and of themselves. But mostly, because this year we will be heading up to our family camp... twice! I could not be happier or more excited about it.

Our family camp is a little piece of heaven to me. It sits right on a beautiful spring-fed, glacially carved pond, high up on a little mountain. When we are there, we swim all the time. There are mountains all around for hiking, and other ponds to visit a short walk away. The pond even has a nesting pair of loons who live on the central island. They frequently tour around and sometimes pop up out of the water just a stone's throw away when you're swimming. They also call you out of sleep deep in the night with their eerily beautiful, ancient songs. There is a spring just across the pond where everyone in the community gets the best drinking water in the whole wide world. Really.

The thing I like best about it, is that when I am there, there is no worrying. I empty my pockets as soon as I enter camp, and I put away everything that connects me to the modern world—cell phone, check; wallet, check; car keys, check...then I just play. Cards, board games, swimming, playing music and the occasional hike are pretty much all we do up at camp.

But this little slice of heaven is not so heavenly for everyone. You see, our camp lacks a few of the things most folks take for granted. Cell phones don't get service up there. There isn't even a regular telephone. You would need electricity for that and the camp doesn't have it. The camp has no running water. No shower, no bath tub, ... *no toilet*. The last item is a deal breaker for a lot of folks.

Now, of course we are not *completely* uncivilized. We do have a shower bag that you can fill up if pond bathing is not for you. Of course, we don't have a shower stall... There is an outhouse a short walk from the camp. We have chamber pots for overnight needs, because it gets deeply dark once the neighbors across the pond turn off their big electric light. *Then* it can be hard to find your hand in front of your face, much less make your way through the woods.

It's this kind of straightforward, no frills living that I hear Jesus calling us to in today's Gospel reading. When he says "I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear,"¹ I hear Him calling us to simplify our lives. When Jesus encourages us to "look at the birds of the air," or to "consider the lilies of the field" to see that they are *not* sowing, reaping, gathering, toiling or spinning, I hear Jesus encouraging

¹ Matthew 6:25

us to put down our work and play a little.² And when Jesus asks “can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?,”³ I hear Him calling us to relax.

Friends, I think Jesus is trying to tell us all something...Could it be that Jesus wants us all to go on a vacation? Jesus seemed to live pretty free and easy, after all. He would walk from town to town, and rely on the hospitality of strangers.

Today we might call Him a drifter, or even a bum. But if we take the example of Christ’s life seriously as a model for our own, it is clear that we could all do a little less with our lives. *Maybe* we could not busy up *every* single moment of our time. Have you all heard the expression 24/7? It’s kind of the symbol of modern culture these days. Cell phones assure that we can be reached any time of day—not just at home, but wherever we may be. Some stores stay open 24 hours a day, just in case we need to get a cola or some gas at 2:27 a.m. And people’s schedules—even the schedules of kids and young adults—are sometimes simply bursting at the seams with planned activities. Whole weeks have passed when I have been unable to talk with my own daughter because she has been booked every evening I called.

But Jesus calls us *all* to cut it out. To put away the day planners. To unplug the cell phones, and to consider the lilies of the fields and the birds of the air *as our role models*. Jesus calls us to go on a vacation from the every day. Maybe not a physical one; maybe not to actually go anywhere different, but He calls us to take a vacation from the usual patterns of our lives. He calls us to let go of our worry; to relieve ourselves from the anxiety of the everyday grind and to change our attitudes.

I hear a call from Jesus to lower the bar of human expectations so that we can raise the bar of heavenly participation. After all, who is all our usual busy-ness for? Does it help any of us to feel more centered or more calm? Does the worry of the everyday help our moods, or hurt them? How about our relationships with our family and friends? To whom does our busy-ness and worry bring us closer? Not to our children or spouses. Not to our friends. Have you heard the cliché about how no one wishes on their death bed that they had spent more time at the office? There you go.

Jesus asks “can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?”⁴ Of course not. There is ample evidence that stress and worry shorten our lives, perhaps even dramatically. Stress raises blood pressure, interferes with proper organ function, and can wreak havoc with even the best of diets. Wally, my primary teacher in my ninth grade year, is an example of that. He exercises every day. Never-the-less, thanks to genetics, he had alarmingly high blood pressure when I last saw him. So, he decided to exercise more, to watch his diet carefully... and still had high blood pressure. He is simply not the kind of person to let stress and worry go, and it works against him.

² Matthew 6:26-28.

³ Matthew 6:27

⁴ Matthew 6:27.

Stress and worry are all too easy to come by in our modern culture. Now, I realize I may well be preaching to the choir here in the beautiful small town of Westhampton. Something about the setting is simply relaxing. I remember well the first time I drove here. I had been in Boston for years by then. When I stepped out of the car on that drizzly evening, I breathed deep of the sweet clean air, and I felt calm and happy. That is still true every time I come to church. But, beautiful scenery and small town charm aside, there is stress even here in Westhampton. I know at least some of you work outside of the town, for one thing. I know some of you work a few jobs to keep up with the bills. And I know that sometimes our family relationships can be sources of stress and worry for any of us.

It's not easy to get into a vacation state of mind with all that going on. It's not easy to lower the bar of human expectations in order to raise the bar of heavenly participation. Our worry and stress can make it hard to watch the birds, or the flowers in the fields, or to play instead of work. As Protestants, we have been brought up to think that hard work is right. Proper. Holy, even. We have all heard that saying "Idle hands are the Devil's playground," right? That doesn't exactly promote taking a lot of down time, does it? Why would good Christians want to encourage Satan after all? But that saying--and our shared culture that produced it--completely misses the point of Sabbath as a time for rest and renewal, and the necessity of play for building our souls. It also misses what Jesus is calling us to in today's scripture.

If we are afraid that any idle moment will open the door for the Dark Lord to step into our lives, how are we going to any time to be still and know the presence of our God? It's a Catch-22. Danged if you do, danged if you don't. But Jesus says do! Do consider the birds and the flowers; do relax, do play! Play helps us to release our worry, and to find joy in our lives. Letting go of worry allows us to *perceive and receive* the blessings of God that are all around us in the world.

When we follow Jesus' recommendation and observe God's other creatures we become witnesses to the world's beauty and goodness. Not the human made world of steel and glass and concrete, but God's good given world of splendor and overflowing blessing. That could not be more huge. When we turn our eyes and our souls to God's creation, we taste, at least for a moment, of God's original plans for us. We can breathe in the sweet air that dances with God's life giving Spirit. We can wriggle our toes into mud and soil. And in the sunlight bouncing off the water in a favorite pond we can stand in the very light of Eden. And in those moments, we can be still and at peace with our good and loving God, just as Jesus tells us to.

So, friends, I commend you—get your hands dirty soon and often. Pick wild berries and let the juice get all over you. Smell every wild flower that you come across. Play each and every day. Trust God to keep the world turning with or without your efforts. Go places that you love that are green and real and beautiful, and when you are there, put away your keys and cell phones and anything that disconnects you from being fully present to God's abiding presence. Swim often, play games. Surround yourself with people that you love.

Consider the lilies, observe the birds, open yourselves up to God's glory in this beautiful world. Don't worry about your food or drink. Don't worry about your clothes. Or anything! Don't

worry, let it go—perceive and receive the blessings of God that are all around us. Don't worry, be Holy!

Amen.