



LESSONS IN LIVING

“Getting Beyond Worry”

A St. Andrew's Sermon
Delivered by Dr. Jim Rigby
August 3, 2025

Scripture Readings: Matthew 6:25-34 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? 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? Can any one of you by worrying, add a single hour to your life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that 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, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

Sermon

Where were we before we were so rudely interrupted? *[laughter]*

It was back in March. Thank you all for being here - for the support. These last five months, the staff and church went the extra mile. It felt so gratifying to watch you on Zoom and YouTube and see the congregation pulling together. I realized that, while I'm (I think) still wanted, I'm not needed anymore. This is coming from the community, from the people, which is how you know it's going to be there after I'm gone.

For those of you who don't have any idea what I'm talking about. *[laughter]* About five months ago, I went to the dentist, Dr. Graves, wonderful dentist. She loves gadgets. She's always buying the crest of the wave, scientific things. She sees a blockage in my throat, which you don't expect the dentist to find that. She recommended I go to a cardiologist and see, be able to measure how intense that was.

I'm sitting in the waiting room and there's these commercials for heart medicine, and they're describing the different symptoms. I'm going, I've got that. I've got this.

It was very strange.

Then I go into the doctor's office. At that point, I thought I had no heart problems at all. I had no idea. Again, they put the little sticky things on and do the EKG, and they said, "*You're in cardiac failure.*" They put me in a wheelchair, go across to the hospital, and so then I'm in the ICU. Very strange experience.

What was weird, though, was I was dealing with some pressure things here at the church, and it felt so good not to deal with them. *[laughter]* I'm just sitting there chilling and relaxing. One of the nurses comes to me and I apologized that she had to spend so much time in my room because in the ICU there's a lot of busyness. She said, "*Well, you're the most critical patient tonight.*"

I thought, you probably shouldn't tell somebody that. *[laughter]* Then I got this weird, kind of sick pride. I wanted to go to the other patients and say, "*I know you think you're really sick. . .*"

What I decided to do when I realized I didn't really have any control over the situation was try to learn as much from it as I could. I had open heart surgery, and I tried to look at it like I was going to a month-long Zen camp at gunpoint. *[laughter]* There was an opportunity to learn some very important lessons about life, about suffering, and all these kinds of things, because I've had a very sheltered life, I think, for the most part.

But that sense of relaxation, that sense of complete absence of stress - I think that's available to us all the time. We have so many things to worry about in the world right now. There's so many things that if we think about them, they break our hearts. Usually, the decision is between just checking out, never looking at the news, or just swimming into the swamp. I guess it's not a swamp. It was a swamp before Trump. It's like a toilet now. He got rid of the swamp. He drained the swamp, and turned it into a sewer.

I'm actually non-partisan. Everybody go ahead and laugh. My issue is universal human rights. Everything and everyone I care about is under attack from the Republican Party. I have the same concern for them, and having their rights met. It's not about politics, it's about humanity.

Jesus is going to try to teach his followers that compassion that can stand up to the brutality of their time. Trump is not the first would-be dictator. History is full of people, and the people Jesus is talking to live under the thumb of Caesar. We don't understand Christianity if we don't realize that Jesus is talking coded terms to oppressed people, occupied people.

The parables Jesus teaches about the Kingdom of God is about the world as God would want it to be, where everybody has a home, everybody has clothes, everybody's taken care of. But Jesus wants this to be a joyful path that people walk, where they're not depressed and living in anxiety every day of their life.

He's giving the Sermon on the Mount, and I think one of the most important facts that gets neglected about Christianity is how Jesus begins. He does not begin by teaching the Bible, not by anybody say the Apostle's Creed, not singing a hymn. He takes them out of the city, away from

their religion and away from their business and away from their politics. He takes them out to this sea. He says, *'Look at the birds. You want to know how you should live? Look at the birds.'*

He says, *'They don't work. They don't have jobs.'* Do you realize when humankind started, there weren't jobs and businesses? Whatever you feel about the word 'capitalism,' it's important to realize once you start measuring value by property rights, you've lost your own heart. From that false calculus, this nation has condoned slavery and poverty and is allowing social services to be cut, medicines that people need to live.

We need to deal with those things, but we need to keep our own heart alive. We don't need to suffocate looking at the pain that is around us.

Jesus said, *"Look, when you're overcome, study the birds of the air. You, too, are life."* We forget we start living in the story we're taught. We forget who we are in the circle of life. We forget we are cells in the body of life, the web of life.

Jesus is trying to bring people back to this sense of life. A church that baptizes you into itself has betrayed you. That's not what Jesus is talking about. He's not talking about religion; he's talking about life. Religion is the toolkit to work on that. But religion that cannot see beyond itself, into life, into love, has betrayed you.

We are all part of the web of life. What the right to life movement doesn't get is that life is ecological. Women are not petri dishes that life develops in. Life struggles with life.

I am freaked out by the fact that I have a cow heart. *[laughter]* My aorta, anyway. I don't have leather shoes. I don't have leather pants. I try to minimize suffering for animals and things, but I now have the heart of a cow. You'll be working on your jokes already. *[laughter]*

The point is we're all a part of the circle of life. As much as we would like to live in our stories that humanize everything, it isn't about humankind. That's not what Genesis is trying to say. We are part of a larger life, and it's critical to remember in bad times, particularly when you're facing your own death. Realizing life isn't your biography. That's not what Jesus is talking about.

He's talking about the web of life, but he's also talking about the energies of the cosmos. That electrical energy that undergirds life. There's a sense in which the world is a stage and life can express itself through us. But the key thing is what we manifest. Life is unfair. You may or may not get to the place you want to go, but you can shine and radiate the best parts of a human being, no matter what. In some ways, the worse things get, the more beautiful that light can become.

I'll never forget early in the process of being in ICU. They weren't sure if I was going to pull through. I don't know how dangerous it was, but I'd go to sleep and then I'd wake up and the room was filled with doctors and nurses and stuff.

All of a sudden, I realized they're working this hard to save my life. That seemed very beautiful to me. My poor brother, who had come down to help me, was trying to stay awake late into the

night. I realized I wouldn't trade a world of pain if the price tag was that compassion. There's a sense in which compassion is born of the unfairness and pain of the world.

To realize even if your life doesn't make any sense whatsoever, every act of love you give to others is a gift you can't calculate, you can't measure.

The first thing Jesus does is take people out of their comfort zone and say, '*Consider the web of life.*' Then the second thing he says is, "*Seek first the Kingdom of God.*" We're not ready for that yet though.

I want to shift over to India and the Bhagavad Gita.

I want to read one of the most important passages of any scripture in the world. This was so important to Gandhi, and I found it incredibly helpful as an activist.

This is Krishna talking. The hero is Arjun, he's human. Krishna is Hinduism's version of Jesus Christ. Again, realize that religion is a fairy tale that awakens you to the true magic of living. It's not self-contained. If you went back to biblical days, you'd see an ordinary world. The stories are told in fantastical trappings so you can understand experiencing it as sacred and you can experience your life as sacred.

Bhagavad Gita 2.47-48

You have a right to perform your prescribed duty, but you are not entitled to the fruits of action. Never consider yourself the cause of the results of your activities, and never be attached to not doing your duty.

Be steadfast in the performance of your duty, O Arjun, abandoning attachment to success and failure. Such equanimity is called Yoga.

In Zen archery, people shoot, you line up the arrow as best you can. If a gust of wind comes after you fire your shot, don't count that as failure. When you do your duty, what a burden it takes off to think you don't have to win. You don't have to, in your lifetime, accomplish a life-saving thing.

Never consider yourself to be the cause of the results of your activities or to be attached to inaction. Life is moving through you. Something deeper is being expressed through you.

Again, "*Be steadfast in the performance of your duty, oh mortal, abandoning attachment to success and failure. Such equanimity is called yoga.*"

That's the balance of fear and desire. The word 'yoga' comes from the same word as the 'yoke' Jesus used inviting people to join his yoke. We live in a time that is so painful, and yet if we do what we can, we can sleep at night if we release the idea that we need to control everything, because we can't.

When I was talking to the surgeon, he was talking about the operation, how he's going to cut into the heart and all this stuff. I stopped him and I said, "*Do I have any options, really?*" He said, "*No, you need this surgery.*"

I said, I don't need to know any of this. I felt like such peace and relaxation because I didn't have those pictures in my head of them cutting into my heart. I just had to be asleep, and I could do that, and lay there like a log. I can do that.

My mom used to sing a song when I was a little kid, and I didn't necessarily like the song. It didn't make any sense to me, but she'd sing it when I was upset.

It goes,

*When I was just a little girl,
I asked my mother, What will I be?
Will I be pretty? Will I be rich?
Here's what she said to me,*

*Que sera, sera.
Whatever will be, will be.
The future is not ours to see.
Que sera, sera.*

My mom wasn't thinking about my surgery when she said that. This was decades and decades ago. But those seeds were planted. The seeds of love can come up in the worst as well as the best of times. And you never know. But what Jesus is saying is, When you do your duty, just realize that worry brings nothing to the game. Worry about things that are not in your control. It makes you unhappy, but it doesn't bring any happiness to the world. Yes, become an activist, you do whatever you can do, but you do it in joy and in peace. What a shame it would be to waste this trip to the world.

Now we're ready. Jesus says, '*Seek ye first the Kingdom of God.*' The Church has not done a good job of explaining this one. It's important to realize that the word Kingdom of God in Hebrew is an adverb. It's not a noun. It's a parallel of the Will of God.

When you think of it as an adverb, it's not a place you go to that's going to be permanent. There is no permanent place in an evolving universe. That symbol short-circuits what you know about the world. Instead, heaven represents being in tune with the changes of things. It means saying yes to life. It means realizing you are not the form, you are the flow. Everyone you know and love is going to go. And, spoiler alert, your time will come. It will be very important at that moment to know you are not the form. You are the flow that begins in the Cosmos. Being born again may mean returning to the creative principles that give you being and living out of that.

We were very lucky to be born into a time when democracy was a dream. We may get back to that, but we may not. It's very important that your happiness not be on the line, that your peace of mind not be on the line, and most important, that your love not be on the line.

The word used for worrying here is like a dog chasing its own tail. It's a mind that measures everything. Worry is focusing so much on the future, you lose the present. It's focusing so much on what you don't control that you don't do the little things you could do.

In the Bahgavad Gita, it's called 'equanimity.' Heaven is balance. Heaven is attunement to the changes of things. Heaven is choosing to be the flow, not the form. There's so many things to worry about right now. Every time you turn on the television or you tune in Trump to see what's been destroyed overnight.

When Jesus says, "*Consider the birds of the air,*" I think he's saying, take Caesar out of the center of your mind's eye. Take Donald Trump out of the center of your mind's eye. Donald Trump is one person out of eight billion. One person. You can live in the whole world.

In Jesus' time, it was Pontius Pilate, and Caesar. They still had joy and happiness and love. We have that possibility, too. The way we do it is, first, remember, we're part of the web of life. If we're in despair, stop for a moment, leave your politics, leave your religion, leave your business behind, and watch birds, watch squirrels, watch animals. They don't know anything about the things we think are so important. And soon you realize those things are not important, not to my life, not to what gives me being.

Then from Gandhi, that idea of surrendering the fruits of your action. You do the right things, but you don't know what the seeds you plant are going to do. They may crop up decades later. Choosing the kingdom means choosing love, to live in attunement to life, and to not let the storms of life rob us of peace.

If you could put it into a song, it might have these lyrics,

*Que sera, sera,
Whatever will be, will be.
The future's not ours to see.
Que sera, sera.*

Well, thank you so much for hanging in there while I was gone. That's just my thoughts. We'll take a moment now for you to reflect about how you understand this.

Benediction

Rev. Erica Knisely

Look for the birds. Look for the squirrels. Remember that your life is part of a much bigger story. A story about life itself. Go from life into life, from love to love. And may we all walk in peace. Amen.

Transcribed and edited by a member of the St. Andrew's Sermon Transcription Project.

Our Vision Statement

St. Andrews will be a church that celebrates and lives Christ's universal love in the modern world.

Our Mission Statement

The mission of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church is to learn and teach the radical and universal love of Jesus Christ by:

- ❖ *Nurturing individual spirituality and growth*
- ❖ *Fostering a community that shares and celebrates the circle of life*
- ❖ *Providing space and time for personal and communal reverence*
- ❖ *Championing the cause of human-kind and courageously acting to overcome injustice*



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