

Do not worry...

**Romans 8: 18-25 - Creation groans**  
**Matthew 6:25-34 - Do not worry**

Today, little Jacob, almost 1 year old, has begun his life journey with God. What a wonderful start in life... to have God on your side! God's good plans, are spoken over Jacob's life today - and our prayer for him is that over time he discovers that life with Jesus at the centre is full of hope and not fear. A life that does not need to be beset with the worry and anxiety, which Jesus refers to in our gospel reading today.

Jesus says:

**'Do not worry about your life'... 'Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?'**

But we do worry, don't we? And apparently more now than ever.

You may have heard in recent years of the rise in young people suffering with anxiety disorders. There are many causes suggested, but two caught my eye recently...

- The excessive engagement in social media and the pressures of living in a digital age, exposes young people to more anxiety than previous generations. Drastic measures were taken in Australia at the end of last year to enforce a social media band for under 16's (and other countries may follow suit).
- There was an interesting mention of something I hadn't heard of before called 'Toxic Happiness'. This is the culture of believing that everyone should be happy and so parents feel it's their job to make sure that their child is happy twenty-four hours of the day. (*I say 'Good luck with that, James and Kelsey'!*)

My Dad was a fount of wisdom until he developed dementia. I remember once as a young woman when I was going through a difficult time saying to him, '**How come I'm a Christian, but I'm not happy?**' His words have always stuck with me: He said, Rachel, God never promised us *happiness*. In life you will go through many peaks and troughs, and happiness will come and go, but you can have **joy** in all circumstances when God is accompanying you.'

His words ring true.

~ Happiness is transient and is dependent on my circumstances.

~ **Joy** forever runs underneath and is dependent on my life in Christ.

**Jesus says, in our gospel reading:**

Don't you know that God, who thinks to clothes the lilies of the field in all their beauty and glory, **cares about you**. If he cares enough to feed the birds and to clothe the grass, which is so transient, how much more precious are we, his children, to him?

Do not worry...

I wonder how many here worry and suffer with anxiety.

'Do not worry' Jesus says,  
'Do not strive' as the world strives.

Of course we have to plan and work and eat and wear clothes, (Jesus isn't suggesting we sit back and do and wear nothing) but what he means is don't invest so much in the physical, material life, as if that is all there is. Because the life is so *much more than the body. Real life is life in the Spirit!*

Jesus says, verse 33:

***'But seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well'***

It is important here to look at the context. Jesus is not saying - put God first and you will never go hungry or be in need; we know that poverty and suffering in life are real issues for many people. This is about anxiety and worry.

Jesus IS saying, make it your priority to seek God wholeheartedly, above all the other priorities in your life, and he will give you a *new perspective* on worry and anxiety. They will not rule you. Because you will know that **you are God's priority**. Your loving faithful Father, will accompany you through the flood so you will not be overwhelmed and hold you in the fire, so you will not be burned. (Isaiah 43:2)

Paul writes in **Romans 8:18** that whatever we are experiencing, our present sufferings are incomparable to what will be revealed to us one day. This is our firm hope. This is what carries us through the trials and struggles of life.

If we read Romans 8 from the beginning we would learn in the verses leading up to today's reading that we need not *fall back into fear*, for God's Spirit within us tells us that we are his beloved children. The Spirit reassures us that *so intimate* is our relationship with God that we can cry out to him 'Abba! Father' This is the same as calling him "Daddy". And like a father embraces and holds a fearful child tight, God will hold *us* fast through life challenges.

We are free *not* to be anxious, because when God adopts us God *frees us from ourselves*.

We are his children by name, and we inherit all the gifts God has for us.

Just as James and Kelsey want the very best for Jacob, just as they want to give him good things and lavish their love on him, so God is with us, his children.

As Jacob's parents I am sure you will:

- Rejoice in his toddler exploration of the world.
- You will delight in his first steps and echo back to him his first words
- You will share in his laughter
- And hold him tight when he is hurt

Do not worry...

- You will, in the future worry if he makes wrong choices
- And do your best to guide him towards *wise* choices
- **And you will want to be involved in *his* life throughout the whole of *your* lives.**

God is involved with *us* and cares about our state of mind.

I mentioned 'Toxic Happiness' earlier. It is a denial of sadness and an attempt to bury our heads in the sand. God does not pretend that life is rosy. He does not lie to us about the condition we and the world are in.

Neither does the Bible. Paul writes, in Romans 8:v 22, that suffering is universal. It is not limited to humans. Instead, the brokenness of humankind extends its damage into creation itself. We are all part of what God designed - and we all feel the effects of our selfishness, wrongdoing and mistakes - what the Bible calls 'Sin' - it causes us pain and harms God's created world.

Paul writes:

***'We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.'***

Now I'm sure that Kelsey remembers her own groans during childbirth almost this time last year (as do I remember mine even 30 years on!); childbirth hurts! It is labour in its hardest form and there is no comparison.

(I do remember my Dad saying to me after the birth of our eldest son that he once had 'really bad cramp,' which he imagined must be just like labour). I don't remember exactly what my response was, but it certainly wasn't one of sympathy!

Childbirth is agony, but it is temporary. And after it comes joy at the new life brought forth.

Creation groans as in labour.  
Yes it does.

When humans decided to go their own way instead of God's way, the ripples were cosmic. We were created to be part of nature - to live in harmony and enjoy its fruits. In Genesis 3, after the Fall God talks of the *ground itself* being cursed, producing thorns and thistles, and describes a changed relationship where instead of *harmony* between us and the earth it will now require hard work for the earth to yield its fruits to humankind.

Look at our relationship with creation now...

- Now we tear up the earth to create places of comfort for ourselves.
- We poison our atmosphere for our own ease of life and pleasure.
- We consume so much of what we want without a thought to the consequences in others' lives ~ and the environmental impact.

Do not worry...

- We think that creation is here for us to do what we want with it, no matter the damage or distress it causes.

You may have seen on TV last year the most distressing news item about a mountainous illegal dump in Kidlington, Oxfordshire, between the River Cherwell and the A34. I could not believe what the drones and cameras revealed: 21,000 tonnes of waste was secretly dumped, creating a pile of hazardous waste up to 150m long and 6m high. (490ft) x (20ft).

The waste is seeping into the river, causing immeasurable contamination of the local waterways. It is a man-made ecological disaster and the damage is on an epic scale. The cost of the cleanup will run into millions of pounds - and of course there are many other similar cases around the country.

How can people have so little regard for the gift of creation as to intentionally harm it?

Is it that if these actions are hidden it doesn't count as wrongdoing?

Do people believe that any personal contribution towards reaching net zero is merely a drop in the ocean?

I almost wept at the evil intention of the Oxfordshire case, it is beyond belief. But then I thought that perhaps none of us are entirely innocent. What about our responsibility? Alongside the developed countries and huge corporations who contribute to the carbon footprint, many of **us** as individuals cause environmental damage (through negligence, weakness and our own deliberate fault). Instead of the obvious cases like the Oxfordshire one, over decades of selfishness our collective negligence causes 'death by 1000 cuts' to the environment.

Our careless use of certain materials, discarding of plastics, or short unnecessary trips in the car, our poor recycling habits, purchasing of new goods instead of recycling or up-cycling, our relentless consumption of meat which causes environmental ripples around the world... these are a few of the accumulative ways we *ourselves* harm nature instead of restoring it.

We are called to care.

To care for each other *and* for the gift of creation.

What Jesus did on the cross, when he died and rose again, had fantastic universal consequences; Jesus died to '**make all things new**'.

**Colossians 1:20:** God was pleased, through Jesus Christ...

***'to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.***

Do not worry...

Christ died so that the entirety of *all things* can be reconciled to God, including restoring the earth to its intended state. And Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5, Jesus has passed on to *us* this ministry of reconciliation.

Insufficient time...

by Paul Kunert, a former congregation member here. He looks at the environmental crisis from a Christian perspective and calls us to align ourselves with God's priorities. We are to care, because when we become children of God we became part of God's holistic reconciliation plan.

- Why not Read this?
- Make life changes.
- Join the Climate & Ecology team

I want to draw this to a close now.

Be encouraged that although we are witnessing creation groan, and *we ourselves* groan with our troubles, the new life we have in Jesus Christ is the beginning of the reversal of the mess. Just as the environmental agency in Oxfordshire has begun the process of cleaning up the mountainous waste, so God has begun the process of restoring *us* and creation to himself. *Our* calling is to seek to do our part within the suffering until:

***'The creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.'*** (v 21)

God has made us his children and holds us in the middle of life's mess. Every one precious, every one known, none are excluded, every one of us is a *delight* to the Father.

We are now in the process of painful labour, but labour is temporary.

Do not worry... God will finish what he has started.

Because after labour comes joy at the new life brought forth!