

Sunday 8 February 2026
The Sunday Next Before Lent

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: Genesis 1: 1-2: 3

NT: Romans 8: 18-25

Gp: Matthew 6: 25-end

The lyrics to the 1988 hit of reggae singer Bobby McFerrin apparently took their inspiration from the teachings of the Indian Spiritual master Meher Baba. Baba famously gave up speaking in 1925 and from then until his death he communicated nonverbally writing on scraps of paper and an alphabet board he became a favourite of Hollywood A-listers and 60s rock stars. Another quote which is attributed to Baba: "There are very few things in the mind which eat up as much energy as worry".

This would appear here to mirror our gospel reading from Matthew, Baba giving an exhortation not to worry because it wastes our energy and pulls us back. But is that what Jesus is saying in this passage? Can this passage be considered as some sort of self-help mantra, a punchline to be put on a poster another "Keep Calm and Carry on" how do we read it and understand it? Which words or phrases stay with you as you listen to today's readings?

'And God saw that it was good' from our first reading? The first sentence of the epistle? 'I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.' Or Jesus' advice to those who had come to listen to what he had to tell them on the mountain? 'Do not worry.'

If we think about it, there's a contradiction here. If God's creation is so good, why is there suffering? And if we're living amidst suffering, what is the hope we should have, that means we don't have to worry? Jesus clearly isn't telling the crowds to sit back with a complacent smile and to do nothing. Those who followed him didn't have this experience. And of course, ten chapters later in Matthew's gospel, Jesus is warning his disciples that those who wanted to follow him should 'take up their cross.'

Going back to the account of creation in Genesis, it is obvious that God doesn't sit back with a complacent smile and do nothing, even though from the very first what has been created is good. The nature of God isn't to stop after success, it's to continue. The completion of one part of creation leads to the next. And creation is clearly not for the selfish satisfaction of God: it's to be opened and shared, not least with the elements of creation itself.

There's a dynamic here that's reflected in Paul's epistle. In this, creation is a process of change, likened by Paul to giving birth.

All change involves hard work, sometimes pain, as anyone who's experienced change in their place of work, or simply in life, will agree. It's tempting to celebrate a comfortable, more or less okay, state of affairs and use this as a reason not to change. For some, this temptation is so great that they dig in and obstruct change. We may have had experience of this, at work, in church, in society generally. Sometimes it goes with a nostalgia for an idealized past which never existed. Stepping out towards something new involves letting go and putting out into deeper waters. But without doing this we are unlikely to advance the Kingdom of God.

And, advises Jesus in the gospel, it will be easier to move into the unknown if we're not too tied to the status quo. And here is the nub of the Gospel message not "don't worry be happy" but don't worry and focus on God and his Kingdom. Set in the centre of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus's radical message of the coming kingdom "Do not worry about your life" follows immediately from Jesus saying this 'You cannot serve God and wealth' If we really espouse gospel values, we'll set more store by justice, truth and love than by amassing material wealth and living a comfortable life. And this setting aside comfort in order to find something more valuable will, in the end, prove its own reward

This is hard for all of us and in order to embark on the journey we have to engage with some transformative thinking and acting. Whenever leaders want people to take a new direction, they have to prepare them and inspire them, which is exactly the theme of both the epistle and the gospel.

Paul's epistle is intended to inspire new Christians to begin the work of creating a new world. His are words of hope. Jesus' words are to prepare his disciples to leave the past behind and to strike out into the unknown. He speaks of faith. If we have the faith to cast care aside and to lean on our Guide, to quote the words of the hymn 'Fight the good fight' we'll be on our way. We may not be successful at our first attempt.

To quote Thomas Edison, 'I have not failed: I have just found 10,00 ways that will not work.' There is much for us to worry about. The world in 2026 is an even more dangerous and frightening place. We have an unstable President in the United States of America who appears evermore like the Peter Sellers character in Dr Strangelove. The war in Ukraine is continuing with Russia threatening nuclear destruction. Countries are decimated by earthquakes and thousands of people dead, heaping more misery on a people who have suffered through years of civil war. Economic hardship and uncertainty caused by the cost of living crisis impacts each of us as we experience rising costs with many facing fuel poverty and needing foodbanks to meet basic needs. The level of public sector strikes are unseen since the 1970s. And on this Sunday when Christians are called to remember racial justice, just a few miles from us Asylum seekers fleeing war and famine live in fear of mob violence

'So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today'

To persevere under circumstances like these calls for more than tenacity; it calls for faith. But with God, where no worldly immediate success is promised, with a narrative that includes pain and sacrifice – taking up one's cross, no less – we have the right to expect that all we need will be given to us.

To live without worry can sound to some to be impossible but here at the heart of the Sermon on the Mount is an invitation that few of us take up yet if we did we would find it liberating.

This Gospel message calls us to focus on God's kingdom and his righteousness, God's kingdom which Paul says we already can glimpse in the first fruits of the spirit in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Wouldn't it be better this week to try to worry less and focus instead on his Kingdom.

We are created by God to be exciting, vibrant and, in the words of Genesis 'good.' This is where we're going, through the sacrifice of Jesus and with the help and advice of Paul. Let's pray we're up to the task. And let's celebrate the challenge.

Don't worry, be happy now.

Fr Bill Addy