

**October 13, 2024 – Harvest Thanksgiving Festival – Revd Wim Kuiper
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Readings: Joel 2.21-27, Ps 126, 1 Tim 6.6-10, Matt 6.25-33

The simple but profound question of Jesus to us on this Harvest Thanksgiving Festival is: 'Can anyone of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?' Now, I have to say that in raising my children I only rarely used any Biblical quotes. But this one I did use. I have not checked it lately, but I am pretty sure my children will remember me using this phrase every now and then. Rather as a sentence with an exclamation mark than as a question, like: 'You cannot add a single hour to the span of life by worrying! In the old Dutch Bible translation: *'Je kunt geen el aan je lengte toevoegen door bezorgd te zijn!'* As much as I thought that it would be useful for the children to hear this, I guess I was also preaching to myself at that time, as I am still doing today. I also needed to hear these words of Jesus again and again. Because the responsibility to care for children gives us normally much more worries than our children. And one of the biggest lessons all parents need to learn is to stop being overanxious and to gradually let go of control. We have to show our children that we increasingly trust them do the right thing in looking after themselves and trusting that they are also in God's hands, just like we are.

More in general, I think this Biblical quote is a fine antidote to cure us from the tendency to worry in unhealthy and unhelpful ways. Using words of scripture as an antidote to all kinds of unhelpful thoughts and feelings and the wrong kinds of behaviour linked to them, is in fact something that Jesus practised himself. Remember how he reacted to the temptations in the desert. He countered the devil by using three Biblical citations. The first Christian hermits and monks who developed monastic life in Egypt back in the 3rd century, the so called Desert Fathers, were very good at it. One of them, a monk called Evagrius Ponticus, produced a whole catalogue of some 600 quotes from the Bible to be used in all kinds of different situation to get rid of the wrong kind of thoughts and feelings. In other words, using Biblical quotes to fight of our temptations.

Not all worries are of course completely wrong. They also help us to lead our lives in a sensible, balanced and relatively cautious way also when it comes to how we deal with our material possessions, our money. So it is not about dismissing such very rational kinds of behaviour like saving some money to deal with changing circumstances, taking insurances or paying into a pension scheme, as many of us will do. Though at the same time, we should be aware that these behaviours can make us less generous and more greedy. We can even become a prisoner of such schemes. I have seen people clinging on to jobs they really did not like anymore, just out of fear of getting a smaller pension if they would change their profession or leave earlier.

We like to be in control of our own life and of the lives of our loved ones. But deep down we all know that we are not. That is a very unsettling thought. As adults we have to face the reality that we are fragile and indeed mortal beings, living in an unstable world full of dangers. But we will not find any peace of mind, nor live a fulfilled and joyful life, when our reaction is to becoming more and more anxious, fearful, trying to hoard as much material

means as we can. These are temptations that can be countered using the words of this simple question of Jesus. But we can and should go beyond that. Looking for ways to foster our hope, to increase our neighbourly love and above all to strengthen our faith in God's loving mercy. Jesus showed this path of trust in the loving care of his and our Father, even though his life was constantly threatened and his life perspective grew dimmer and dimmer.

One of the great ways to strengthen this trust is the practice of gratitude. By cultivating a constant attitude of gratefulness for the many good things in our life. Counting all our many blessings, day by day and linking them to God's providence. Being grateful for the simple things that we may take for granted. Such as the light of the sun, the air that we breath, our daily food and drink and the roof above our head. Grateful for our worship today as we thank God for this season of harvest and also for the fruits of our own labour and the joy we receive by sharing some of those fruits with family and friends, with our church community and with those in need in the wider world. When we are more and more aware of the gifts we have received out of God's hands, it will be easier to start sharing more of it with others to the glory of his Name. And the more we are aware of the steadfastness of God's love for us, the less we will get carried away by our busyness and worries with regard to our earthly treasures.

Perhaps we have been able to experience God's love and closeness in difficult times in moments of crisis that we have experienced in the past. Instances when we have clearly felt that our prayers were answered. A sudden awareness of God's consolation in dark hours and our resilience as his gift to cope with them and to come through. As the Psalmist in today's Psalm 126 puts it: 'Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed, will come back with shouts of joy, bearing their sheaves with them.' It is important to keep reminding us of such experiences. To engrain them deep within our memory, for instance by writing them down in a journal and by sharing those experiences with others. These our powerful testimonies that may help all of us to increase our faith in God's providence.

So, let us continue to remind ourselves, that nothing can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus. Let his spirit of love, faith and hope breath through all our deepest worries and anxieties. Enabling us to live a more fulfilling life based on trusting that God, in the end, will never fail us.