

1 Corinthians 4:1 Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

2 In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.

3 But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by *any* human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself.

4 For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord.

5 Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, *but wait* until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of *men's* hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

Matthew 6:24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

25 "For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, *as to* what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, *as to* what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

26 "Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and *yet* your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?

27 "And who of you by being worried can add a *single* hour to his life?

28 "And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin,

29 yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these.

30 "But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, *will He* not much more *clothe* you? You of little faith!

31 "Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?'

32 "For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

33 "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

34 "So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Sermon: Worried?

Loving Creator shine as a light before me that you may be seen and not I. Give me words that I may speak, give us ears that we may hear and through your Holy Spirit help us understand.

Amen.

I put fifty-six dollars in my gas tank this week, and it wasn't even empty!

Has someone put more than that in theirs?

It is almost unbelievable what has happened to the price of gas, and oil. Demand world wide has shot up because other countries, particularly India and China have found the joy of driving cars. They have embraced our example and have entered the mobile age.

So demand is up. And at the same time the supply of oil is being reduced as existing oil fields are running out of supply.

On the whole humans are burning more fossil fuels this year than last year, all this while a majority of scientists tell us that the burning of these carbon based fuels is making the earth warmer.

I saw a report that the glaciers in Greenland are melting at an ever faster rate. There are now fissures in the ice sheet now reach to the ground some thousand feet down. The water that pours into those fissures may increase their march to the seas, it greases the way. Eventually Greenland may actually be green.

Yet Jesus says, "Do not worry."

Food has also gone up. I recently saw that one ice cream company is reducing the size of their half gallon from 1.5 quarts - it already wasn't a half gallon - to 1.25 quarts. This was done to coffee some years ago, a pound can of coffee is actually more like 12 ounces, not 16. Perhaps a pound will eventually only be 10 ounces.

While the sizes are smaller, the prices are higher. The estimates are that food prices have risen as much as %40 in the past year alone.

When we moved here to Monson, just about 4 ears ago, milk was about a dollar fifty a gallon. That would perhaps get a quart today. Those with children in the house know how hard this has been. When we had four in the house, we went through a gallon a day.

We Americans live in one of the wealthiest countries in the world. In other places across the globe food shortages are threatening millions.

But Jesus says, "don't worry."

This year, even with the new boiler system here in the church, we have exceeded the expected budget for heat. That is with gas, I can't imagine how bad it would have been if we were still burning oil to heat this building.

At the parsonage, we have fared a bit better, in part because we burned a lot of wood during the winter, and the spring. But next year it promises to be even worse.

As an aside, if you happen to be cutting trees on your property - hardwood, not pines- and have no place to burn them yourselves, we will take it for the parsonage.

The town wide fuel fund received a nice boost last year, but all that came in has now been spent as a minimum delivery rose to over 400 dollars.

And Jesus says, “don’t worry.”

The town of Monson has had to look at alarming cuts in services at the schools and at the senior center and all over.

We are seeing one of the most difficult financial situations in years with housing foreclosures and drops in housing values and a general decline in stock markets, all this in addition to rampant inflation.

And Jesus says, “don’t worry.”

What about the response of a single mother to this passage. “Yeah, right! It’s a week before payday and I’ve got just enough money to buy bread and peanut butter to eat for a week, but nothing left to buy a jacket for my kid, and it’s snowing outside. And I’m not supposed to worry? Get real!”

Would we read this passage to someone in Myanmar, or China, who’s home is obliterated, and who has no food and no drinkable water?

What, is he crazy? Doesn’t he know what we are dealing with here?

I don’t know about you, but I get distressed when I look around.
Every time I fill my gas tank it disturbs me.
Every time I go to the grocery store I am worried about what it costs to feed my family.
And, when I watch the news from around the world, I am concerned for those who have even less and whose problems are much bigger than mine.

How can we not worry? Jesus must be crazy!

I better calm down a bit before my blood pressure jumps through the roof.

This passage does speak positively to those of us who are living quite comfortably, with all the essentials of life. Our physical needs are well met. And still we worry.

As slow and chilly as it has been, I have been enjoying the spring.

We have beautiful creeping phlox in pinks and purples along the driveway given to us by Joan Moran. The apple trees were beautiful, like mounds of cotton candy; the willows punctuated the hills with that beautiful yellow green; the maple trees have burst open; the dogwoods almost sparkle with their beautiful flowers, and the copper beech has opened leaves to glow in the sunlight.

Just yesterday I stepped outside to look at the flower garden and found a morel, a somewhat rare gourmet mushroom, it was growing right there.

We have been watching the birds in the yard. The robins built nests and laid eggs; the cardinal is often singing in the tops of the oak trees as the sun rises; we think we have a Baltimore oriole coming for the oranges we put in the back yard, and the pair of morning doves has been cooing on the railing outside our window.

I have already seen the bunny rabbit in the back yard, smelled the skunk, and, when I was in NY with the confirmation class, we saw squirrels carrying their babies, something I had never seen before.

Every morning I watch the sun come over the horizon and think how beautiful God's creation is.

Every day I get to see other people, and I get to share stories and activities and the work of life with other children of God.

Every evening I count my blessings and thank God for my life.

Perhaps that is what Jesus meant.

"Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and *yet* your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And who of you by being worried can add a *single* hour to his life?"

When disasters happen we often hear people say, "well I'm alive." When we hear about a house fire, or a car wreck or a tornado that wiped out a town, we are relieved if no person lost their life. Houses can be rebuilt, cars can be replaced, towns can return to life but people cannot.

Life itself is precious, and how does worrying make life any better?

We may be faced with many challenges today. Financial pressures are at the top of many people's lists right now. So what else is there to do but worry?

How much does it cost to smell the flowers? Or to sit in the sunshine? Or to marvel at a bird in flight?

How much does it cost to spend time with people you love?

Perhaps Jesus wants us to set our priorities in order.

He says, "You cannot serve God and wealth."

What is important? How do we choose?

"Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' Or 'How will we fill our gas tank' For the people of the nations eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first God's kingdom and God's righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

We are expecting our second grand child any second now. When Walker was born two years ago in February, we would go up there as often as we could. We would do our shopping in Keene so we could stop and visit with him, and his mom and dad of course. We thought little of running up the 60 miles to see him.

But that was when gas was a measly \$2.00 a gallon – I never thought that 2 dollar gas would be the good old days so quickly. Now with gas at nearly 4 dollars we have to rethink our habits. Is it good stewardship to run up there so often with gas prices so high?

In the recent memory of most Americans we have become accustomed to taking many things for granted, like driving and flying and eating foods shipped thousands of miles to our tables. But are these things that are crucial to our lives?

Is it necessary to see my grandchildren every week?
Do I really need fresh strawberries in the middle of winter?
Must I drive everywhere I want to go?

There is a great scene in the movie LA Story. Steve Martin comes out of his house and walks to his car parked in front of his house. He gets in the car starts it up and drives about 50 feet to his neighbor's house, stops the car and gets out. That may be an artistic exaggeration, but we have become accustomed to things a certain way. Cheap gas allowed us to drive without thinking much about it.

We could look around at the way things are today; we could mourn and pine for the good ole days, but to what end? Why spin our wheels about the things we can't change?

Jesus is clear that we need to put our priorities in place and we need to do the things that will bring wholeness, the wholeness of God's Kingdom. We can look for more efficient ways to use our resources. We can seek better uses of our time and energy. We can think about how God wants us to live.

In God's Kingdom we have what we need. In God's Kingdom 4 dollar gas is not an issue. In God's Kingdom we are good stewards. In God's Kingdom we are concerned with the environment. In God's Kingdom we find sunshine and birds and flowers, and we find other children of God with whom to share our journey. Just look around you at the people who are sitting here today.

We do have all we need to be God's children and to serve and love our God. If that comes first, all the other blessings will be added.

So why worry?

Thanks be to God.
AMEN.