2 before Lent A: Genesis 1 & Matthew 6: 25-end

**May I speak in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

A friend of mine is back home now having spent most of the last week attending the General Synod of the Church of England. He wasn’t looking forward to it but came away with a pervading sense that there is anxiety in the Church and that justice in many areas needs to be done.

So it is fortuitous that the readings we have heard this morning all relate to those issues. This is the don’t worry gospel: it invites us to relinquish our anxiety. What should we do instead? Seek God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness. And all that is indeed absolutely as it should be – the Church has been wrong on so many counts over the years and needs to repent and put things right as best it can – and needs to learn to welcome everyone with arms as open as Jesus’ arms would be.

And I had another conversation earlier this week about anxiety too - related to what one of my sons called Millennial Entitlement. Our millennial generation has grown up with the sense that it can have everything. More than that, that it is entitled to whatever it wants and dreams. Ideally today and not tomorrow.

Our number 2 son has had huge upheaval over the past eight months or so: concern first because Lindsay’s visa options were expiring, then getting married, and on top of all that, he was offered a new job. Fine, but it is in Manchester, while her work is in Cambridge and London. And then all the moving house and changing job stuff, and starting over in an environment which is entirely new to both of them.

And then he finds that, while he went in as number two in the team, he is being treated as number three because he doesn’t yet know in any depth the business he is now in. And from my perspective, that is fine; he will take up the reins when he has learned a bit about smart meters, but from his, this wasn’t what he signed on the dotted line for. And he doesn’t want to be number two anyway; he wants to be number one. Like, now. And on and on. So it isn’t any wonder that he is anxious about his life and all its uncertainties.

Someone – I don’t know who – said: The problem of worry is not reserved for the first-century hearers of Matthew's Gospel. In fact, if you look around your world today (from the very personal to the very global), you may find that anxiety is the new base line in the symphony of life. I believe that is true – I talk to so many people who live with constant low-level anxiety, and it can be exhausting.

But actually worry is what we always preach on when we get these readings. So I don’t want to give you that! Today I give you: **Ecotheology**

Here’s a thought: God made not just humankind but the whole of creation. Check out the reading we had this morning from Genesis, chapter 1. (But bear in mind that there is a different version of Creation in Genesis chapter 2. These are attempts to make sense of God in creation – not to be taken too literally).

 And God loved what he had made and saw that it was good. And in due course God sent His only Son into the totality of that Creation; not just for humankind, but for the whole of Creation.

And our belief in the Son of God must by definition lead us to concern ourselves with the wholeness of creation. And it does sort of tie in with the stuff about worrying or not, because when we can live in some sort of harmony with the lilies and the birds and the grass, then we really won’t have to worry any more. But we need to be able to see the lilies for what they are: not just lilies, but God’s lilies, God’s gifts, God’s sign of His love for all that He has made.

Earlier in this gospel of Matthew’s, Jesus has given his followers a sort of textbook for what it means to be a disciple, covering everything from caring for others to how to pray. Here, though, he is giving them some practical instruction regarding their relationship with money – both getting it and spending it.

And as I said already, this culture of worry is not new: the disciples are in a bit of a spin. Remember, they have left their homes and livelihoods to follow this strange but compelling personality – they have left behind whatever it was that represented their security. They had been called; were excited, but as with any new job, would also be worried that they might not be able to handle it: How **will** they eat? What will they wear? What will people *think* about you if you just start talking all the time about Jesus?  So Jesus is having to teach them to let go and know that God will provide.

Now if you take that absolutely at face value, it might seem to imply that **we** have no responsibility for caring for the basic needs either of ourselves or other people. And that would be a very dangerous theology of life and living to hold. Extrapolated, it might lead us to a prosperity-type theology, whereby those with enough faith get taken care of and learn to ask for ridiculous things like personal jets – quoting some of the American media mega-preachers – while those who struggle might be dismissed as just not having enough faith, or worse, not being loved as much by God.

Dangerous territory indeed, and entirely contrary to the real gospel message of good news for all people, who are loved equally by God. Those of you who are still working out what you believe are loved by God just as much as those of us who already profess faith.

Just rewinding a bit: these birds of the heaven and these lilies of the field are not literal but rather symbolic, I think, of God’s care for everything that He created. Jesus is redirecting us away from our own concerns and towards God’s concerns. Look, he says. At the birds. Consider, he says. The lilies of the fields. And seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

And when all is said and done, looking and considering does indeed lend balance to our angst. I am going to be on retreat for part of the coming week, and one of the things I am most looking forward to is the chance to walk some new paths and to see new things. The time to pay attention to the wow-ness of the natural world – both the bigness of creation and the smallness of it. I am no therapist, but I do know that appreciation of the world around me slows me down and gives me both awareness of God and peace.

So, point 1: God cares for the whole of creation and being aware that we are part of the whole created order gives balance to our lives.

Now then, point 2. Christian Stewardship shares something of the process of creation. God did not, even though the story may imply it, create once and then sit back, brushing the dirt off his hands. Creation is an ongoing process – one in which God is involved, but one in which also, we have responsibility to share. Some things, the disciples could leave to God, but other things were very much within their remit.

May I remind you of the story I started with, about my friend’s trip to General Synod this week. I tried to watch it live online, but some of it was a bit like watching paint dry. However, over the course of four days, they covered a lot of ground. And it seemed as though all of the main themes returned to one thing: justice.

Justice for the Windrush generation; justice for the survivors of systematic and institutional abuse by those within the Church; justice for those who are dismissed and sidelined for their race or sexuality or any other reasons at all. And there is still creative work to be done until there is justice in all the world. And there is still creative work to be done while people and governments destroy that which is created.

And we cannot leave justice only to those who are members of Synod. Neither can we leave care for the created world to Greta Thunberg. These are big big issues. But the answer to the question: How do you eat an elephant? is: one bite at a time.

Every little nibble is worthwhile: every eco-tip attempted and every injustice challenged. It was the writer Iris Murdoch who said: we don’t need more therapy, we need more beauty … and beauty comes in many forms.

Look. Consider. Seek. Let us enjoy and protect and sustain that beauty of and in Creation, so that it might continue to protect and sustain us.

**Amen**