

So often I have found reasons to worry before any long trip. What if we miss a flight connection? What if something happens when we are gone? Did I pack too many clothes? Not enough? (The list can go on forever!) I have gotten much better with my “worry issues” (I think) but it is easy to drift into that mode.

Suffice it to say, we all know how to “worry.” What are issues that click the “worry switch” on for you? I don’t know if we are “wired to worry,” or if it is a learned trait, but it is certainly a familiar past time. As you reflect upon what causes you to worry, answer these two questions: Why do it? And what does worry ever change?

Martha’s concerns would make any worry wart proud. She was obsessed with making Jesus feel like a special guest, but worried that she wasn’t doing enough. Ironically, her worry kept her as far away from Jesus as if she were in another world – which she was!

Even though Jesus appeared to be the object of her worry, her efforts were really all about “Martha.” She didn’t want to disappoint. She didn’t want to feel guilt. She just couldn’t help herself! Mary chose another path. She was busy too, but it was being quiet and simply being content to sit at Jesus’ feet. And what were the results? Well, Martha thought she was helping Jesus, but she missed the chance to let Jesus help her. Mary on the other had had a great visit!

This story is identical to last week’s parable of the Good Samaritan. Obsessed with worry about whether they might become victims or ritually unclean, a priest and Levite failed to offer loving service. But a foreigner saw a wounded traveler, and simply stopped to see how his gifts might be used in service.

When we think about it, the greatest problem with “worry” is it distracts us from solutions. Worry internalizes serious issues and makes them even bigger. Even though it consumes a lot of effort and energy, “worry” is passive, it is selfish, and it is unproductive as it has no power to change or deal with the issue at hand. In fact, “worry” is actually more of an “avoidance” than faithful living.

We worry about feeding the hungry, melting glaciers, paying bills, where all the plastic goes, someone we love, recycling paper, being sensitive enough to others, -- certainly those are issues Jesus would have us pay attention to. When we are consumed with worry, we are busy with “our needs and fears.” We assume that if we do something, we feel better about ME, (and our busyness will not allow for any time to worry.) But we always find the same thing in the end. When the busy-ness ends, the worry remains. It is only in healing the need to worry that there will ever be true peace. And sitting at the feet of Jesus is where that healing and peace always begin.

This story is like the one where Jesus fell asleep, surrounded by disciples, on a storm ravaged lake. Even though they had witnessed countless miracles and knew of his love for them, they were too worried to trust that he knew what was going on and had the power to keep them safe. So he showed them how misplaced their worry really was.

Isn’t it ironic that we know Jesus can calm storms on a lake, but we still worry?

If you think about it, Jesus entire reason for living, dying and rising from the grave were to overcome the need for worry. Having conquered what we cannot, we now are free to live with what we really can control and become. The gifts Jesus brings are daily and powerful. In Bible study, prayer, and fellowship, we are touched by the body of Christ. It is that touch that heals, forgives, and leads us into the gifts of faith, confidence and trust. In taking time to listen and learn, to pray and to be nourished, we gain the gifts and the insights that make our service more meaningful and informed.

Jesus certainly appreciated a good meal and a clean house, but more than that he loved his friends and enjoyed sharing their lives. Martha forgot that she could never disappoint Jesus. All he wanted was to be close to her – just as he seeks to do for you and me. Worry has no result except to become a barrier, an excuse, a busy-ness that will only separate us from God and the peace that he brings. When, like Mary, we surrender our need to control, and sit at Jesus feet, miracles happen.

Have you ever thought that Jesus is like that wounded traveler in the parable of the Good Samaritan? When a man knelt down to help, he was offered the opportunity to serve. “Love God, love neighbor” always begins by kneeling at the foot of the cross and empty tomb. If we are busy with worry, we will never hear the ever-slowng beat of Jesus heart at the cross and realize the gift He shares for us. If we are consumed with worry we will never see the glory of that empty tomb and how the emptiness of death allows for fullness of life.

Martha wanted Jesus to take “her side” and make Mary help be busy with worry. Jesus surprised her by saying, come to my side and let my love set you free. So, what name do you go by? Is it Mary or Martha? Are you like the priest or the Samaritan? Are you afraid of storms or willing to trust in Jesus’ promises? Does worry keep you busy or will you surrender and simply sit at Jesus’ feet?

There is an old story of two monks from a very sheltered monastery that avoided any contact with outsiders. They were walking alongside a muddy path in a driving rainstorm, and as they rounded a bend they came upon a beautiful young girl in a flowing white dress standing under a tree, looking across the path.

She said, “I cannot cross the path because the mud and water will ruin my dress. They looked at each other, unsure of what to do. Finally, one monk simply picked her up and carried her to the other side so she could continue on her journey. As the monks got back to the monastery, the other said, “We are not allowed to go near women, especially young and pretty ones. Why did you stop and do that? Why did you touch her?” The first one said, “I left that girl back on the road, why are you still carrying her?”

Jesus asks us the same question he asked of Martha. “What are you worried about?” “Why not let go of what is keeping you so busy, and simply come and sit with me?” Worry is going to rear its ugly head from time to time, but it no longer needs be a lifestyle. Why not take Jesus at his word and trust that he will carry what you have such trouble letting go of?

How can anything we find to be busy with be more important than the time Jesus has for us? Faith is a gift that allows us to sit at Jesus feet, to listen, and to be loved. And as that gift is opened any need to worry is erased by grace.