

This may not be an overly pastoral thing to say out loud, but this Gospel passage is not my favorite part of our Scripture collection, to say the least; because, I would prefer not feeling as if I am thoroughly disappointing God with the fair share of worrying that has come along over the years. Having to grow up and mature and make big-kid decisions and all that adulting nonsense brought along some worries here and there, wondering if I knew what the heck I was really doing, and then a few years ago a sonogram revealed not just one, but two heartbeats, and Sarah and I started to wonder if...well, you know what was about to hit the fan. Soon enough, we would not worry quite as much about our own lives, what we will eat and what we will drink, and about our bodies, what we will wear, but instead, we would transform our worries to their lives, what they will eat and what they will drink, and about their bodies, what they will wear. And we have been assured that that worrying never ends, not even when they start taking care of their own food and drink and clothes and big-kid decisions about life: that the worrying about children lasts forever. So, I guess I might as well get used to disappointing God in that way when it comes to this not-my-favorite portion of Scripture.

However, I have this feeling that God is more than fully aware that human beings are seemingly ingrained, hard-wired to worry about so many aspects of life, since so much about this whole mortal journey appears to be beyond control for ourselves, let alone those we love. I have this feeling that God knows full well that we will, in fact, worry, and not because we are asking our hearts and minds to do so, but because we do care, no matter how much it may appear in the world as if...well you know what is hitting the fan. We do want what is best. Perhaps it isn't so much that our Lord is expecting us to never worry, but hoping that the worrying will not completely dominate our day-to-day living. For that would only cripple us to the point of giving up on all hope whatsoever, from going into loving action for one another, from experiencing the bountiful goodness of God that still fills this world, including the very depths of our soul.

Looking back, we certainly reached a fever-pitch level in the worrying department soon after we brought not just one, but two newborns home for the first time: worrying about their lives, what they will eat and what they will drink, and about their bodies, what they will wear, and much, much more beyond that.

And I still remember seeing their pediatrician for the first time, and him saying that, soon enough, all the chaos would be more than worth it. It was as if he was doing his own Gospel proclamation in that moment. That somehow, someday the worrying will miraculously be overwhelmed when they start smiling at from ear to ear as if they were trying to brighten not just the whole house but the entire block around us, or giggle so uncontrollably and so infectiously that you cannot help but laugh right along with them, or when they stare into your eyes and latch onto you so tightly as if the unexplainable love might just give more than enough to keep on going, no matter how much the worrying tries to win us over.

Yes, Jesus has a point that the worrying will not add a single hour to our span of life. So, God insists on finding the most beautiful ways to overwhelm those worries with signs of uncontrollable hope, the most infectious love, the most entrancing grace to make us believe that this God adores us through all the hours of our span of life. And it may just be that the absolute youngest among us are the best teachers of that life-altering Gospel. They may have no idea what they're doing for us, by nurturing family and random passers-by with their awe-inspiring playfulness.

They're evidently just ingrained, hard-wired into being such important messengers of hope.

So, as we approach our National Day of Thanksgiving, I remain thankful for the utter simplicities of life, the ones that often get overlooked, as if in those simplicities can come the greatest beauty of all, and even the strongest symbols of our Lord's mind-boggling care for us. Because this is the God, who, no matter how much we worry about whether we did enough for our own health or for the well-being of family and friends, God will still smile upon us all hours of the day and night. This is the God who will take on our fear of death and whether our sin is far too much for us to have a chance at an eternal life; God will show us just how much that is not the case by going to a cross and coming out of a tomb with the most infectious joy-filled victory over it all. This is the God who will stare into our eyes when we keep ourselves up at night and will never let us go from the strongest embrace of love, as if we are worth sticking beside throughout this life and all eternity.

Yes, as we approach that National Day of Thanksgiving and a holiday season that has its annoying tendency on unleashing worries and stresses galore, Jesus knows no matter how much we read and hear this Gospel passage, we will still worry. Nevertheless, our God insists that fear and anguish and worry will not take over our lives; instead, this Lord will continue to surround us with a relentless smile of hope, with the most contagious giggling over how much he enjoys what we have to offer this world, and stare into the depths of our soul with a most beautiful admiration, as if nothing that happens in this life can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our still Risen Lord. So, worry, if you like, but God will never stop being latched onto you with all the grace that even heaven itself cannot contain. So, for that Greatest News of all, not only this week, but always, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!