#### Psalm 126

 **1** When the LORD brought back the captives to Zion,
       we were like men who dreamed.

 **2** Our mouths were filled with laughter,
       our tongues with songs of joy.
       Then it was said among the nations,
       "The LORD has done great things for them."

 **3** The LORD has done great things for us,
       and we are filled with joy.

 **4** Restore our fortunes, O LORD,
       like streams in the Negev.

 **5** Those who sow in tears
       will reap with songs of joy.

 **6** He who goes out weeping,
       carrying seed to sow,
       will return with songs of joy,
       carrying sheaves with him.

## Matthew 6:24-34 (New International Version)

 **24**"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

 **25**"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? **26**Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? **27**Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

 **28**"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. **29**Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. **30**If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? **31**So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' **32**For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Parent knows that you need them. **33**But seek first God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. **34**Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

“Rest In Me”

The Rev. Lisa J. Durkee

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.

Sing: Write these words in our hearts, we beseech thee, Oh Lord.

I shared last week how my mother and grandmother had committed to memory the poem that helped me—and I hope now you, too—to make sense of how we might move forward into the future with confidence and faith, knowing that we walk with God. Although I have not spent time this week committing it to memory for myself, I *have* found myself thinking about the things that stick in one’s mind. I remembered how my sister and I could sing nearly every commercial jingle we had ever heard. I’m guessing there are some of you who could tell me, for example, just exactly how to eat an Oreo properly.

Somehow, though, exercises in memorization have fallen out of practice in schools and in churches. Sure, there are those aspects of worship that we share in repeatedly, and therefore “know by heart.” The little line I sang to begin is one that I believe I heard each Sunday growing up. One of the reasons I’ve been thinking about memory passages is thanks to my buddy Todd who, in an e-mail exchange, responded to a dilemma I shared with him, “Choose this, not that,” quoting Lao Tzu, the Chinese philosopher whose pithy statements make up the Tao Te Ching. By it, I believe he meant that there is a conscious decision on our part when we elect to focus on something negative, or on something that brings us anxiety. The solution is to choose the other or another thing to warrant our attention.

It occurred to me as I had already been thinking about memorization, that this is an easy little phrase to recall. Looking to my own faith tradition for similarly pithy statements, I thought about how little of the Bible I might consciously recall from memory. I was wishing for a similar ease, and well beyond the Proverbs.

I think several sentences in this morning’s lesson may be ones we know by heart, even if we don’t recall them frequently. In an international climate of worry and fear, though, maybe it is time that we did so. In a time when this church is actively focusing on ways to grow and to engage with others in greater loving service, on what good advice will we balance our decisions? I have liked the way that a professor of mine used to describe such verses: We can keep them in our pockets like smooth stones to draw upon when we begin to worry.

Let’s recall three of these together.  **33””**But seek first God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” **34”**Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” . . .  **25**"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?” Any one of these passages can stand alone as a wise adage on which we could rest our worries and our fears, but our faith often is not strong enough to let our concerns fall away. In our anxiety, which lives side by side with our unbelief, we do everything we can to try to control our *own* lives, sometimes by *acting* to shore up the defenses of savings accounts or of extensive wardrobes, or by *acting* to fill our time with *productive,* remunerative activity. Sometimes our worry—the exact worry that Jesus asks us to put aside—is paralyzing, and we neither act nor give with our time. We simply worry, and therefore keep to ourselves the gifts we have already received. Who of you by worrying can add one single hour to your life?

What if we gave up worrying for Advent, rather than giving up chocolate or even Brussels sprouts for Lent? Maybe what we need to kick us into the habit of giving and sharing of our time and our talents; into the habit of seeking righteousness first is a trial period. My prayers have changed in the past several years, somewhat in response to some wise words from my oldest brother. I don’t know that I ever before prayed simply, “Take this Jesus.” It’s a good prayer, kind of like the Carrie Underwood song, “Jesus take the wheel; take it from my hands.” I imagine there are certainly times in each of our lives when we have prayed that God might relieve us of whatever burden we might be carrying. Sometimes, I pray this for you. That prayer feels as certainly faithful as any I may offer. I trust that God hears me when, in distress, I call out.

So, when are we going to start trusting that God also hears us when, in sensing our abundance, we try to give? Dear God, please help me to open my heart and my life in such a way that I put your reign in the center of my vision. Please let me trust that when I give to you and your work you will provide for my every need. I found myself rereading this past week one of the headier texts I was assigned in seminary, as I thought about what I believe is a kind of natural inclination to worry. We’ve all heard about original sin, and some of us about original grace. Sometimes I wonder if there isn’t a kind of original anxiety. Reinhold Niebuhr, in his seminal work, *The Nature and Destiny of Man,* writes about the connection between anxiety and sin. He says, “The ideal possibility is that faith in the ultimate security of God’s love would overcome all immediate insecurities of nature and history. That is why Christian orthodoxy has consistently defined unbelief as the root of sin.” As he explains earlier, because we are anxious, “all human life is involved in the sin of seeking security at the expense of other life.” What a far cry this is from our not being anxious, because, as Jesus observes, “Our heavenly Father knows that we have need of these things,” all things we might need. How incredibly freeing this is! We don’t need to be in control of everything. Another wonderful, simple statement comes from our brothers and sisters who share in the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous: “Let go and let God.” Still, though, it is very difficult for us.

To move from acting out of anxiety to acting in faith isn’t something that will happen overnight for most of us. When we think we might manage it on a small scale in our homes, we may find that it is harder when we consider our nation; we may find it even more difficult when we try to press ourselves on a global scale. Really, though, if we trust that God cares for humanity whom God has created, we can trust that God will love us into peace and goodwill. For us to believe this and act accordingly may well take time, however, and we can be grateful that God, who loves us, is also patient.

To look with the eyes of faith at everything and everyone with which we are engaged may happen in baby steps. To make each decision in our lives, choosing the “this” of faith in God’s love and care rather than the “that” of anxious worry can happen, but it may take time. In its 1995 report called, “Our Global Neighbourhood,” The Commission on Global Governance quoted a woman named Barbara Ward. Although the original reason for her writing was very different from our own context, I believe its wisdom can be brought to bear on our turning to God in faith rather than to our concerns with worry.

 “The most important change that people can make is to change their way of looking at the world. We can change studies, jobs, neighbourhoods, even countries and continents and still remain much as we always were. But change our fundamental angle of vision and everything changes our priorities, our values, our judgments, our pursuits. Again and again, in the history of religion, this total upheaval in the imagination has marked the beginning of a new life… a turning of the heart, a “metanoia,” by which men [sic] see with new eyes and understand with new minds and turn their energies to new ways of living.”

Isn’t this really our challenge, to change “our fundamental angle of vision” so that we see—and seek—first what God would have us do and be, in response to God’s love; to trust that in loving us God will not let us fall? And then, how much more might we serve God in response to that love? We may well “choose this,” the building up of God’s Kingdom, and “not that” which may be security at the expense of another’s life. In doing so, in living into a new vision that involves seeing other’s needs even before our own, we may discover the peace that we have been promised.

I don’t know what has happened to a card I used to carry in my wallet, but its own brief statement makes me smile from time to time when I worry. Twisting a more familiar expression, the card asks, “What part of rest in me don’t you understand?” Jesus tells his disciples and us that God will provide for our every need. What part of this don’t we understand? May we live confidently, faithfully and responsibly in response to the truth of God’s love. Amen