



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Trinity 15 2020 BCP 1662

Galatians 6.11 - 18 & Matthew 6.24 - end (Sermon)

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.*

British people are, officially, the most anxious people in the world: twice as anxious as people from Germany or the Netherlands and nearly 20 times as anxious as the European average!

Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, loneliness, marital status, sex, disability, perceived safety at home, and work affected by the coronavirus have all helped to increase our already high levels of anxiety.

The ONSⁱ has found, for example, that people who "often or always" feel lonely are now almost five times more likely to report even higher levels of anxiety than those who "never" feel lonely.

The percentage of people who are married or in a civil partnership during lockdown report ever increasing levels of anxiety, with the highest anxiety levels rising from 19% to 39%.

Home-schooling, working from home and the fear of losing a job or a house have produced increasing pressures never, perhaps, experienced before. And it is not just family groups who are more anxious than ever before, people aged 75 years and over are now almost twice as likely as those aged 16 to 24 years to experience high levels of anxiety.

So, Jesus' words about not being anxious come as something of a challenge – to say the least!

Jesus' words come from the final section of the Sermon on the Mount and, as was his wont, Jesus leaves those who listen to him a question: *which of you by worrying could add 46 cm to your height?*

To his chosen pilgrim people, Jesus asks: *are you men and women whose lives are lived in the freedom of faith, or, are your lives limited and restricted, constrained by constant fretting and anxiety?*

Well, from the result of the survey by the Office for National Statistics, in the UK at least, the answer seems to be crystal-clear! We are indeed, as a nation at least, men and women whose lives are limited and restricted, constrained by constant fretting and anxiety.

So how can we be *anything* like the lilies of the field or the birds of the air in a time of Covid?

Do we just quickly read on and dismiss this part of Jesus' teaching as being relevant for 1st century Palestine but utterly irrelevant for a 21st century Covid-filled world, or is there still something really rather important here for us to attend to?

Jesus' words although spoken in a particular time and at a particular place, transcend time and place and circumstance; Jesus addresses his question to us today, here and now: *are you men and women whose lives are lived in the freedom of faith, or, are your lives limited and restricted, constrained by constant fretting and anxiety?*

Even in the midst of C-19, we are the people who must stop and take stock and consider the lilies of the field and the birds of the air.

We are those who need the constant reassurance - maybe even more

than our forebears - that as God's precious children, as the subjects of God's grace-filled Kingdom, we really do have nothing to worry about.

If the One who looks after the birds of the air and the flowers of the field, which are, in and of themselves, seemingly valueless, how could God *not* make sure that we - who are of infinite worth - have everything that we could ever need?

So, stop worrying, Jesus tells his Church in every age and in every place: you can't change how tall you are, no matter how much you worry - even if you worry twenty times the European average!

Live in and for the moment, says Jesus! The moment that is ever God's 'Now', God's 'Yes'!

Stop straining agonisingly and fretfully towards a future that may never be! Stop looking wistfully and painfully back to a past that never was! Live for now in and by God's grace - and be thankful!

Goodness, how hard that is for us to hear though, and how much harder for us to believe and take to heart and live out in our daily lives!

As precious children of God, as inheritors of God's Kingdom, as God's chosen pilgrim people, Jesus ask us, whatever the circumstance top place our trust in him and to rest in his love; to put our trust in the One who feeds the birds of the air and who clothes the lilies of the field.

Stop being anxious, live in the moment; live in the freedom of faith-without-anxiety, live in the assurance of God's love and in the knowledge God's eternal love - God's gracious gift which is offered to us new every morning. Amen.