

Christ Presbyterian Church

Edina, Minnesota

July 4, 2010

Laura Crosby

"Glad You Asked - Worry: How Do I Trust God More"

Philippians 4:4-7

Good morning! Well, those of you who have been around the last few weeks know that we are in the middle of this series called *Glad You Asked*. A couple of months ago, we invited anyone who wanted to send in questions, and then we designed this series around the questions. Some of the questions that came in were very intellectual, kind of like what John addressed last week, the creation-evolution kind of thing, but other questions were very much more day-to-day, routine stuff we wrestle with kind of 24/7 which is what we are going to look at today. Several of you wrote in *How can I worry less?* or *How can I trust God more?* I don't know if these questions are on your mind this morning, but they certainly are on mine. They are relevant questions that I struggle with a lot.

Twenty-one years ago John and I were living in Washington, D.C., and the pastoral nominating committee from CPC extended a call and asked John to be the senior pastor here. We had two little toddlers, one and two years old at the time. Finally everything was done except we had to go through one last step, one last formality where John had to come out here and preach for you guys and have you vote and affirm the call or not. Now I've never heard of anybody coming to that point and being voted down because there has been this whole checking references and vetting and many interviews and everything, but still it was a formality that we had to go through.

Now we were really excited about this, but I was also very worried because we had these two little toddlers, and the committee, this was June, the middle of June, and the committee said they wanted us to be in place, settled in by September so that we could start the school year with the community here. Well, that was great, but humanly speaking there was absolutely no way that we could come out here, get the call affirmed, find a house, get the financing, go back home, sell the house there, all that, and settle in here. This may not seem like a big deal to you, but I had visions of us with these two little toddlers living out of suitcases, pulling them around in their little wagon for a year. I was worried. So just pause on that for a minute, and I'll come back to it.

Fast forward to a few months ago. I keep a prayer journal, and one day a few months ago there were three things that I wrote about: a close friend of mine named Heather, not Heather Hood, but Heather, a 30-year-old single woman with a genetic predisposition for colon cancer. She had had all kinds of problems and was going in for her fifth and final surgery with a 50/50 chance of success to correct a problem she had. If it was not successful, she would have to have a

colostomy for the rest of her life and have other medical complications. So there was Heather with the surgery. There was a meeting that was important to me, that I was really invested in. I was worried about the outcome of that. Then, thirdly, one of our daughters was making a really important career decision about a job that was going to affect the trajectory of her life for the next year. So those were all on my plate.

Fast forward to just this week when my worries were about this message. What if I dishonored God in some way or forgot something or said something wrong? So that was the worry that was on my heart this week, and these were some of my little concerns, whether 21 years ago or a few months ago or today. I imagine that, as you have come into this place now, you may have brought some worries in with you as well, whether a small worry about whether we are going to have rain tonight for the fireworks or something very, very serious. Before we go any further, let me just pray for us.

Abba Father, I pray that You would do what only You can do. Abba Father, by the power of Your Spirit, do what only You can do, comfort, strengthen, encourage, convict. Let us meet You today through Your Word. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

I want to start out by asking you to do two things. First of all, I'd like to ask you to take a white card from the pew rack in front of you. You should have been given a pen when you walked in, or you may grab a pencil or something. I'm going to ask you to take that card and write down at least one worry that you brought into the sanctuary with you this morning. It might be a concern about business, about finances. It might be a concern about a relationship, a spouse, or a parenting issue, or a decision that you have to make. It could be anything, something that has been gnawing at you, that has been keeping you awake. Don't put your name on the card. Just hold on to it. Be assured that nobody will see it, ever, so you can be as honest as you want. Just write down one worry that you might have, something that's on your mind.

The second thing that I want to ask you to do is a little riskier. I want you, first of all, to think about some of the effects of worry in your life. What are some of the consequences? You might think of it this way, "When I worry, I (blank)." Think about completing that sentence. "When I worry, I (blank)." What are the consequences of worry in your life? How does it manifest itself? I'm going to ask you to turn to someone near you and share that. Now I know all the introverts are panicking right now. They are thinking, "Oh, my gosh, this is why I almost didn't come this morning," but don't worry because I'm only going to give you 30 seconds, and then it will be all over, and you don't have to talk to anybody again. The extroverts are worried because they are thinking that's not going to be enough time, but don't worry because you can also talk after the service. So would you just turn to someone near you and say, "What is one effect of worry in your life?" Just talk. Thirty seconds.

Okay, who can tell me, what are some of the effects that you came up with? What are some of the consequences of worry? How does worry manifest itself in your life? Just yell it out. You can't sleep, cranky. Sweating hands, doubt. Worries about clocks. Other things? Other effects of worry? Physical pain. You are worried about the oil spill, big global issues that you are worried about. Some of the things that I have thought about are these. I think that worry robs us of joy. It paralyzes our ability to trust God. It makes us more preoccupied and less attentive to other people. It erodes my ability to feel grateful because, when I worry, I am so preoccupied with myself that I am not able to love *you* very well. We are so preoccupied with ourselves that we are not able to look beyond ourselves.

Now as I was looking at this this week, I learned that the word *worry* comes from the German word *wurgen*, which means to strangle or constrict or to choke, and I'm thinking, what a vivid word picture that is. I get this picture of worry strangling the life out of me, strangling the joy out of me. Worry is so spiritually toxic that the most common command in the Bible has to do with not being afraid, not worrying, not being anxious. I am convinced that in addition to this, that worry is partly a control issue. I love this line in John Ortberg's new book. He says, "There is a God, and it is not you." That is so frustrating sometimes. We really would like to kind of be God and have control over everything and make things happen the way we want them to. Craig Groschel has claimed the term *Christian atheism*. He says, "Christian atheism is believing in God but living like He doesn't exist." So when we worry, we say that we trust God, but we really live like everything is dependent on us.

I'd like to share two definitions that have been helpful to me. The first says this: "Worry, in essence, is the sin of distrusting the promises and power of God." That's Craig Groschel. So when I worry, I am, basically, saying, "Okay, Lord, You created the universe, but when it comes to my concerns, You may not be quite adequate." In contrast, this definition from John Ortberg. He said, "Biblical peace is the settled conviction at the core of our being that all things are in God's hands; therefore, we can live free of burden, worry, and fear." Philippians 4, the Scripture that we are going to be looking at this morning, is one among many passages that addresses this concern of worry, but **before we look at the verses, I'd like for us to think about who was writing it and whom he was writing it to.** We want to look at Paul, who was writing this, the Philippians, whom he was writing it to, and us, for whom it was written as well.

Paul was under house arrest in Rome when he wrote this. He was writing to this young church in Philippi to thank them for a gift of money that they had sent to him but also to encourage and instruct them. Now Paul writing about himself in another place wrote this: "Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked. I spent a night and a day in the open sea. I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers." You get the idea he has been in danger a lot. "I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches." To sum up, he has had beatings, shipwrecks, danger everywhere, hunger, thirst, concern for the churches and, in addition, he's writing this from jail. If anyone had reason to be worried, it is Paul, and yet he is writing to the Philippians not to worry.

Most of the people that Paul was writing to, the Philippians, were incredibly poor. Ninety-five percent of them would never learn to read or write. Many of them were lame or sick. They didn't have medicines. Plagues might kill up to a third of a city at a time. A lot of them were slaves. They would never be free. If you were a baby, the odds were that you would not live past age 30, so that was their world. In Paul's day, the living conditions were like *here*, and the anxiety level was like *here*.

But the Bible was written for us today, too. The Bible is for all of us. So what about us today? Today we are better educated. We are healthier. We are cleaner. We are better resourced, and

we are freer, so you would think that we would have less to worry about, wouldn't you? Well, a Harvard guy did this research project and found that today, we are 10 times more likely to be diagnosed with depression than just 40 years ago, even though by objective standards our standard of living is so much better.

So Paul's words are going to be really relevant to us today. We are going to be looking at Philippians 4:4-7 which is on page 1751 in your pew Bibles if you would like to look at that. It will also be on the screen. It is a short passage, but before we look at it, I just want to say, oftentimes **when I'm reading Scripture, I will look for three things. I will look for commands, for promises, and for the character of God.** And so we kind of want to do that this morning, relating to the big topic of worry. In these few verses, we want to look for commands, promises, and any inference about the character of God. This is what Scripture says.

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Now the great thing about this is, it does not just tell us what not to do, it also tells us what *to* do. So commands and promises. Command? Rejoice in the Lord. Not just every once in a while, always. Promise? The Lord is near. Command? Don't be anxious. Another command, pray but don't just pray, pray with thanksgiving. And then a promise, peace, but not just worldly peace but a peace that just passes all understanding. I love the heading in The Message for this section of scripture, "Shaping Worries into Prayers." So in essence, this passage of Scripture is saying, we can use worry as a kind of a prompt or alarm to remind us to turn to God with our concerns. For some of us, that might be really natural. I'm worried; I turn to God, "Help!" Right? But it doesn't just say, "Pray." It says, "Pray with thanksgiving." As I was praying about this message this week, I realized it just isn't natural for me to pray with thanksgiving about what is worrying me.

Paul reiterates this in other places in Scripture. In 1st Thessalonians 5:18, he said, "In all things, give thanks." Now that used to really trouble me because the way I read it was, "Give thanks for everything," but that is not what it says. It says, "*In* all things, give thanks." Now there is evil in the world, and we are to steadfastly stand against evil, but in the midst of these difficult times, we can still say, "Lord, I thank You that You are with me. I thank You that You are all-powerful, that You are sovereign, that You will never leave me nor forsake me."

So we can see commands and promises in Scripture, but what about the character of God? I think just the command for us to turn to God in everything infers that He is capable of handling anything we have. He isn't threatened by our worries. But also in that promise is the idea that He is *with us*. That is another glimpse of His character, that He won't leave us. He is with us in those hard times. So when you pray, do you really think about whom you are praying to? Are you aware whom you are talking to?

If you are like me, there may be a lot of times when you throw out prayers, but you are not really thinking about whom you are talking to. I think that whom you are talking to makes a huge difference in our confidence level. For example, if I have a concern about finances in my day-to-

day life, I'm going to have a lot more confidence if I ask my question of Warren Buffett than if I ask that question of my daughter, who shares some of the same challenges I have with regard to finances. If I have a parenting concern, I'm going to have a lot more confidence if I ask my parents, my own parents, who have raised kids and grandkids, than I would have asking that question of a teenage friend. Whom we talk to affects our confidence level, so when we pray, are we just throwing something up into the stratosphere or are we aware that we are coming and laying our worries before the God Who created the universe, Who called the stars by name, Who parted the Red Sea, and changed the water to wine, and Who knows us by name and delights in us and lived for us and died for us and forgives us? Are we aware of all that? I think this is one of the reasons why it says to pray with thanksgiving because, when we pray with thanksgiving, we are forced to think about whom we are actually talking to. So I am thinking that maybe part of overcoming worry is getting to know better the character of the one that we are supposed to entrust with our worries.

This passage tells us that when we are worried to use it as a prompt to pray, and that is great, but I think it would be a mistake to say, "Okay, bam! There is the magic formula. We are done." Scripture says a lot of other things about worry, but I just want to mention one. Throughout Scripture, it talks about *doing what is wise*. Over and over again, it says this. In Proverbs 9:12 it says, "If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you." So here is how I envision it, (slide is shown). It is kind of like a teeter-totter. We are called to pray with thanksgiving, but we are also commanded to do what is wise, do what we can, in all of that entrusting it to God who is sovereign. But when we were defining this, we said that worry is partly a control issue. I think that most of us are obsessed with trying to control circumstances, but some things are within our ability, and some things aren't. When I am riding in a car and I am in the passenger seat, my family gives me a hard time because I am constantly putting on the brake and leaning and gasping and everything, but it doesn't matter how much I try to put on the brake, the car is not going to stop if I'm not driving it. Now there are some things that are wise for me to do. I can check the brakes of the car, and I can make sure the oil is changed but, basically, then I need to trust the driver. Not an easy thing. I also might need to get a different driver....

So sometimes I say I am trusting God with my words, but I am really acting like I'm going to get this thing done my way in my time under my own power. Sometimes we can overdo that personal responsibility kind of deal, the control part, but other times, we may lean the other way and overdo the faith part. Another teeter-totter might look like this (slide is shown). For example, someone who is out of work, sitting at Starbucks and praying for a new job. That is great, but if the person is not networking and is not making calls and is not getting their résumé up to date, I am not sure that is what the Bible would call us to.

I want to go back to the picture of my friend Heather. I told you that Heather was going to be going in for the surgery. Heather, I believe, is an example of someone who did both things that I am talking about. She prepared. She did what was wise. She got the best doctor. She checked out insurance. She learned about her condition. She gathered people around her to pray for her, and *she* prayed, and she thanked God for His character in all of this. She did what was wise. Well, the day of the surgery, she got a call early in the morning, and they said, "Uhhh, Heather, one of the doctors on the team who is supposed to operate on you is stuck in New Orleans and can't get here, and it will be a whole month before we can reassemble this team of doctors." Well, Heather was emotionally prepared for the surgery. She had done everything she could. Now, she was honest about her dismay, but she also prayed about it. She recognized that she

had done what was under her control, and then she focused on God's sovereign character. She said she might not understand the timing, but God did, and she thanked Him for that.

She had her rescheduled surgery, and she went into the surgery even more at peace. Isn't that amazing? The surgery was successful, and she is growing healthier, but the reason I share this is not because of the outcome but because of the process because there have been other surgeries for her that have not gone as well, but in this surgery, we see the balance of trust and doing what is wise.

Back to the story that I started to tell you at the beginning of the message. The CPC committee had extended a call for John to come here, right? And we had to go through that whole formality thing, but I was worried, and I was sure that God needed help in getting us moved in a timely fashion so to help God out, I devised a plan. Before we left Washington, D.C., to come out here, I called a friend of ours who was the best realtor in the area, and I said to our friend, "Now this is not legal. This is not ethical." I didn't say that, but I said, "This is totally unofficial, but while we are gone, if you happen to know of anybody who happens to want a house like this and you wanted to show them, here is the key, and if you wanted to sell the house while we are gone, that would be really great." All kind of on the down low. Well, what I was doing was not wise. I just didn't trust God, and I was trying to do His job for Him. What I was doing was not integrous, and, honestly, I don't even remember praying about this! So I gave him the key. We left. We came here. John preached, and the call was affirmed. We found a house here that had gone down in price, and we went back home.

As soon as we got home, I called my realtor friend, and he said, "Sorry, no secret buyer, no secret showings, nothing. I got nothing." I hung up the phone, and about two minutes later, the phone rang again, and John answered it. Well, it was another friend of ours, another realtor, who knew *nothing* about our potential move. This realtor said, "You know, the weirdest thing happened while you were gone. I have this family whom I have been showing houses to for over two years. They just have not been able to find anything, but I was showing them houses again this weekend, and we were in your neighborhood, and I said, "You know, it's just too bad that the Crosbys aren't moving because their house would just be the perfect house for you. I pulled up in front of your house as I was talking about this because we were in your neighborhood. It got quiet in the back seat, and my client said, "Uh, this house is perfect. I haven't even seen inside, but this house is perfect, and I have to tell you, I work for the Presbytery, and I happen to know that the Crosbys probably *will* be moving." And she said, "When they get home, call them as soon as you can and offer them whatever their asking price is." Oh, my gosh! Our house sold before it went on the market, for more money than we ever could have imagined. It was like God was just laughing, saying, "You think I can't do this? I'm God, for Pete's sake!"

Now I know that many of you have very significant, heavy worries. Many of you are probably trying to sell houses right now, and I don't want to make light of this at all. I really am only sharing that story because I want to say, "Here is an example of God saying, 'You don't need to do this. I can take care of you. Just pray and do what is wise.'"

We want to end this morning with something a little different. I want to call it a second offering, but we are not collecting money at all. I want you take that card that you wrote your worry on, we are going to pass baskets again, and we would like to invite you to place that card in the basket. Nobody will see this. I am going to invite you to place that card in the basket as kind of a

spiritual practice, symbolic of what we want to do every day in offering our worries back to God, Who is big enough to care of all of them. When the baskets are passed, there will be colored cards in them, and I would like to invite you to take a colored card. It doesn't matter what color. The cards all have the same passage from Isaiah 40:25-29 MSG, a passage that I think is a reminder of the character of God. You might want to put the card somewhere this week where you will see it, in your Bible or on a mirror or something, so that when you are praying, you might be reminded to pray with thanksgiving, aware of Whom it is that you are talking to.

Now, as this is going on, we are going to be playing a recording. There will be some instrumental music; then Amy Grant will be singing a song that has been very meaningful to me, "Be Still My Soul." And then there will be some Scripture readings. I would invite you to use this as a time of reflection and offering to God.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.