

# ***“From Toiling and Spinning to Peace and Joy”***

**Matthew 6: 25-34**



**Dr. Will Cotton**  
Senior Pastor

“Toiling and Spinning.” If I was to describe the frantic world in which you and I live, it would be “toiling and spinning.” In all that toiling and spinning is what we call stress. There is no such thing as “no stress” or “tension-free” living. Stress and tension are actually part of what helps us do good and creative work. If I ever get to church on Sunday morning and I am not feeling some stress or tension, you should be very afraid. Psychologists call it “eustress,” the “eu” part being the Greek word for “good stress.” The illustration of a rubber band gives us a positive few of tension. As we stretch that rubber band there is tension that creates the energy to hold things together. But there is a point where “eustress” becomes “distress.” Our trusty rubber band again helps us, for we know that there is a limit, a breaking point which leads to things

coming apart and becoming painful. In the words of the old cartoon character, where we “have had all we can stand and can’t stand no more.” The toiling becomes extreme and enslaving and the spinning gets out of control. We become sick, frustrated and angry, so that “toiling and spinning” can become “boiling and sinning.” That’s the point where “toiling and spinning” can lead to “boiling and sinning.” The jokes about people going “postal” speak enormous truth about our family, work and even church lives. The recent shooting of the little girls in the Amish school house is as instructive as it is tragic. A seemingly normal individual becomes so angry at the world and himself, that he plots something quite abnormal. And if we cannot see ourselves as capable of doing our own version of desperate and abnormal things, we are already a danger to ourselves and others. And at the center of it all is the choice of a kingdom.

Jesus teaches us from his great “Sermon on the Mount,”

**“Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you.”**

What are “all these things?” According to our scripture lesson, they are the things we worry about. Jesus mentions worrying about our security, our food and our appearance, but the list is not meant to be exhaustive. At the center of those particular worries is fear: for safety and for being deprived of the basics in life. What are two of the main questions Americans ask of their political leaders: Will you keep us safe? Will we be able to provide for the needs of ourselves and our loved ones? Since 9/11, the insecurity of Americans is at an all-time high. We have a Department of Homeland Security, for crying out loud. Who da thunk it?!

But if that’s all we worried about, that would be enough. For the people who heard Jesus that day, safety, food and clothing were the primary worries. But the more you have to worry about. We worry that our children will not gain the scholastic edge they will need to get scholarships and have their best shot at a productive and competitive life. We worry that we are not getting ahead or are not recognized in our work lives in the way that we should. We worry about investments and how we will be able to care for ourselves in our old age? We worry about our health and weight? We worry about the future and the things that could potentially happen to ourselves or our loved ones? Why is it that the more blessed and privileged you are the more you worry? Again, it all seems to be about the choice of a kingdom. And our worries can tell us about the nature of the kingdom we are seeking or building.

But there are two other indicators that reveal what kind of kingdom we are seeking or building. The first is our calendar. We make time for the things we deem the most important. No generation has had more choices and opportunities to do with their time than this one. And no generation has faced more pressure to do all of them than this one. We are duped into thinking that if we don't do it all, we and/or our children will be left behind. This more than anything has families "toiling and spinning" into oblivion. The problem is that in trying to do it all, we end up unable to make the quantity and quality of time for the things and people that matter most: time with our loved ones and time with God. You'll remember that last week I shared that one of the most dangerous things for a marriage or even for working relationships is that we become so busy doing our responsibilities that we end up on separate tracks. That is even more the case with God. We become too busy to pray, too busy to study God's Word, too busy to be in the house of God in worship and be in fellowship with other Christians. As a friend of mine said to me once, when we're that busy, we really are too busy. We forget that the time we set aside with God ends up being multipliable time. We end up "overfunctioning," that is being too busy for our own good, so that we end up in a flurry of activity with very little to show for it. In fact, we may be more behind than before we started to overfunction. So why do we do that? We do it, because in the short run, it works. Who of us hasn't had the high of doing more in a short period of time than we thought we could? We say to ourselves, "Boy, if every day could be just like this. So, then we decide that we can." We fill our calendars. But the problem is that we are not wired that way. What we did was a sprint. You can't sprint a mile or two miles. That's a prescription for burnout. But even more important, we start to believe that everything depends on us and we end up totally consumed in building our own kingdoms.

So it's here I want to lift up the vow that says,

*"I will be loyal to the United Methodist Church with my prayers and **my presence.**"*

In the first church I served as pastor, there was a man who was 99 years old. He could no longer see except for what was right in his face or hear only that which was shouted at him at point blank range (with a hearing aid in). I said to his daughter, "I really admire that he is here every Sunday, but why does he do that when he can't get much out of it?"

She said, "He just says, 'I want to be in my place'. So he insists that we get him ready and bring him every Sunday morning." I love it. He knew that by being in his place, he was placing God in His place. By his presence, he was seeking first the kingdom. In military terms, it is our regular way of "reporting for duty." Hebrews 10:24,

**"Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together on the first day of the week, as some are accustomed to doing."**

This past week, we discussed in staff meeting how busy people have become and how there is no longer any time for Sabbath (for rest and for worship). The results are a declining quality of relationship with God and with each other. Will we make time for God?

Which kingdom are you seeking and whose kingdom are you building? One of the indicators is what we worry about? Another indicator is what we make time for? The third indicator is our checkbook. The scripture is right when it says, **"Where our treasure is, there will our heart be also."** It was no accident that Jesus challenged people to leave everything and follow him. He knew that our assets became builders of a kingdom themselves, requiring constant maintenance and financing. There really is a call for many of us to simplify our lives. In attempting to acquire the American dream we are creating and feeding the American nightmare. Two weeks from today, we will be making our financial commitments for the coming year for the ministry of God through St. Luke's. In those commitments, we will be stating our priorities and the place of the kingdom of God in our lives. My hope is that we will be willing to exchange our "toiling and spinning" for the American dream for the peace that can be ours when we share in bringing about God's dream.

But if we choose to make God's dream and God's kingdom number one, it will mean we are choosing to believe that God will indeed take care of us. And if you have accumulated a number of years, you can cite many ways that God has indeed taken care of you. And if God has been faithful in our past, can we not trust him with our future?

Jesus says, **“Do not worry about tomorrow, for each day has enough trouble of its own.”** E. Stanley Jones wrote, “Worry is the interest we pay on tomorrow's troubles.” He was right. Being anxious over what is yet to be and may not be is suffering in advance for something that may never happen. It is living in the “what ifs.” What if this happens, or that happens? Well, what if it doesn't? As the old song sings, “Tomorrow never comes.” When it gets here, it is today.

And hear the good news: When we put God first, the worries become his, and the gift is his peace that passes understanding. When we put him first on our calendar on a daily and weekly basis, and we end up having the time of our lives. When we put him first financially, we end up doing more with less. At first, these words of Jesus seem restrictive, but the truth is that we are liberated into a life that's a whole lot more worth living.