

## FREEDOM FROM WORRY

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Series: Trails to Freedom  
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Peace, Lent, COVID-19  
Matthew 6:25-34

The last few days have been heavy. Hard conversations and difficult meetings with the leadership teams. Seeing people who are angry about things shutting down. Seeing people who are worried about the infection. Seeing people worried about what the future looks like because their businesses are already taking a hit. I have personally had 3 break downs just under the weight of all the important conversations happening now.

And the thing is we are still not sure what we are dealing with. Social Media and Media, in general, is great at this time to spread information unfortunately it is also just as great spreading disinformation and panic and fear. We are all watching this unfold. We are all longing for some hopeful news while watching some very unfortunate news from the world and on our dailies too.

The president declared yesterday a national day of prayer and we have seen directives from both him and the ministry of Health just keep growing and getting drastic. Partly as they watch the trends from other nations dealing with the same.

At this moment it feels easier and more inviting to tell people it will be okay. And I think that would not be fair. We still have no idea what we are dealing with. We have no idea yet how this unfolds here in Kenya and how the government chooses to respond. We do not know yet how long it goes on in the world around us and how that affects health care systems, economies and people's lives in an increasingly interconnected world. We just do not know those things and it will be fraudulent to say to people it will be fine.

We know that people have lost family around the world and more will. We have no idea how far the infections will spread but we know that more people may get infected. It is very difficult for an uber or Wasili driver to work from home. The truth is the coming weeks and months will be difficult and normal life will change for a lot of people if not all of us. The social and economic cost will be felt all across, whether this takes a few weeks or a few months.

Here is another thing we know, God is still in control. While this caught all of us by surprise, it did not surprise God. He is unshaken and so is his love for us. He is in this with us.

Here are a few other things we know about the church and pandemics. This is not the first one to hit the world and may not be the last one. Yet through all forms of persecution or hard times, whether brought on by nature or the actions of people, the church kept growing and having a great impact.

I am convinced that this is yet one of those times in history when the church is invited to again join God is doing something very beautiful in our neighbourhoods, communities, cities and the world. And how that looks like will change every day as this keeps unfolding. What does not change is our invitation to obey the Holy Spirit every day.

The church has been around for 2000 years and the church has grown and loved the world through many difficult times. Which was actually a huge part of why the church grew.

In the 2nd century, there was the Antonine plague, believers would care for the sick during a time when that plague took out a quarter of the Roman Empire.

During what has been called the plague of Cyprian, the church encouraged people to care for the living and without fear of dangers Christians took care of the sick and provided for their every need.

Emperor Julian who was a pagan once made a note that the Christians took care not only for their sick but also for the sick who were Roman. They went over and above to love the world around them.

In 1527 during the famous bubonic plague, Martin Luther refused to flee the city for his own safety and instead stayed behind to care for the sick.

This is our heritage as Christians. This is the heritage of the church. This is our history. That in times of crisis, we rise up and move the world instead of cowering in fear for ourselves. And I really believe that is the call even now.

Modelling after Jesus who laid down his life for the world, the church has a history of running into places people are running out of in self preservation.

The next few seasons will be difficult for some, for many. Will the church join in the panic of stocking up their own pantries and fridges? Or will they remember those who even if they had the chance they could not afford to stock up on anything? Will we run for self-preservation or pouring ourselves out? Will we fear for our social, economic and even life itself or will we join God in healing the world?

I was so moved to learn that some of you when I heard that someone brought soap to the church to keep our hand washing stations for the community going. Some of you still brought in supplies to keep the food bank going. At a time when panic may cause people to turn inward some of you are rising above that to keep others afloat. And I am grateful. I really believe we are called to heal the world and that is going to be with the help and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

And what loves is our the world around us will present in different ways at different times. At this time it could mean washing our hands more than we often would. Minimising physical contact. And here at Trinity it also meant not having an in-person gathering for a few weeks. We have no idea what it will mean in the coming weeks as this keeps unfolding in our country. One thing that has not changed is our call to love the world.

And our response has to come from a place of love, not fear or panic or worry. Last Sunday we revisited the story of Jesus with his disciples in a boat on a stormy sea. Looks like Jesus was completely at peace, enough to even sleep in the storm.

So even when Jesus is woken up and he calms the sea, it is not from a place of worry or being scared for his own life rather from a place of love for his disciples who were freaking out.

And also, Jesus could only speak peace because he was at peace himself. There was so much peace in him that it overcame the storms outside him. He was not anxious about anything.

If the church is going to love the world at this time, we need to be the ones not anxious. And I know just like everybody else in our society it sucks to be told to work from home if you are in the gig economy. It sucks to have things shut down, it sucks to see soap run out at the stores and people beginning to stock up on food. It is easy to give in to anxiety about whether we will get infected, or what will happen to our families or what will become of us economically.

There is the storm around us. But the storm is not really the source of our worry and panic. Jesus too was surrounded by a storm and was quite non-anxious and peaceful. We do not get stormy and a panicked inside because of our situations around it often comes from inside too.

Here is something Jesus said as he taught his disciples one day

*“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 than food, and the body more than clothes? 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? Can anyone of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?”*

*“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. 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—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.*

#### **Matthew 6:25-34**

You see I think we panic and worry because we have set up the world in a way, even more now, that gives us the illusion of control. And weirdly around the things we cannot control at all, we focus our entire life’s energy. Even build our lives around them. Money, food, survival.

I like the comparison Jesus gives. That even the wealthiest of us who can afford anything ever created by the best designers of the world yet they still are not as pretty as the lilies of the field. Which obviously have no choice in which field they grow in, they have no choice in when the groundskeeper should come with sheers. But when they are in bloom they do so unashamedly alive. They are unmatched in their beauty and the birds in the songs.

Maybe the way to turn ourselves from panic and worry in this season is to not buy into the lie of control over our own lives. Instead, let's ask God what he is doing. Instead of asking what is in it for me and what is the cost, let's ask the pray that God shows us what he unto instead and how we can join him.

We have no control over what happens in the next few weeks or months. Yes, we have responsible actions to take but let us. Especially here in Kenya and East Africa where we are just reporting our first cases. There is no telling yet how it will go. Will the infections spread, and how fast? What will be the impacts? There is no telling really

Even as a church as we move online, there is no telling how long we can do this for.

I have seen memes of how people crossed over to 2020 full of plans and all. And what the last months have reminded all of us is just how much we are not in control of. When we live and when we die. How the year actually goes and so on.

So Jesus invites us to turn our focus to God instead. To turn our focus on joining God and loving the world and removing focus on ourselves. I can't wait to hear the God stories that will come from this season all across the church and the world as believers ditch the idea of control and start asking the question, "God, what can I join you in doing today?"

And we can trust Jesus invitation to not worry. He gets what it is to live a life that we are mostly worried about. He gets what it is to be homeless even as he traveled preaching the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

He gets what it is to know that some of his friends will run away from him, betray him, deny him and even doubt him. He gets what it is to be faced by the reality of death as he led his life towards the cross.

As he finishes his teaching Jesus gives this encouragement

***But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well***

***Matthew 6:25-34***

What does God's power and justice look like in this season? In these times of fewer gatherings and all manner of strain, what could God be inviting the church to?

John Wimber, one of the founders of the Vineyard said, "We are loose change in God's pocket, he can spend us how he wants." And, "It pays the same whether we sleep on the couch all day or feed hundreds as long as it is in obedience to the Holy Spirit.

For some of you, God will call you to make calls to people stuck in isolation. Some of you will feed those who could not manage. Some of you will share funny memes online to keep people sane. Some scientists will be working hard on these things, people in hospitals will



be serving the sick with all they got and some of us will be led to our knees to interceded for those loosing hope.

Whatever it is, join God in it.

Let's pray