

Held in the Echo Week 5
Echoes of the Kingdom

By Pastor Mandy Barkhaus

One thing I discovered over the last several weeks is that five weeks is way too short for the sermon on the Mount. There is so much in the sermon on the Mount. And five weeks, not long enough. We're not even going to touch on chapter seven. And there are so many verses and passages in chapter six that we could talk on, important passages like this one from Matthew chapter six, verses 19, where Jesus says, stop collecting treasures for your own benefit on earth, where moth and rust eat them, and where thieves break in and steal them.

Instead, collect treasures for yourself in heaven, where moth and rust don't eat them, and where thieves don't break in and steal them. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be. Also, I love this passage. I've loved this passage since I think I got my third grade Bible and I. I was like, maybe one of the first ones that I highlighted.

I was like, I love this passage. I just don't know how actually how to live this passage out. Until about ten years ago, when I finally figured out how to live this passage out and it happened. I was going to a conference, and I was on an airplane, and I picked up a book called, Marie Kondo's book.

Some of you may know this. She has a show as well now, but the book is called The Life Changing Joy of Tidying Up the Japanese Art of decluttering and Organizing. Now, there is nothing more that I wanted in my life at the time than to just not live in clutter. My house was just always a mess.

I felt like we were drowning in things. So this book is about going through your whole house and picking up every single item, every piece of clothing, every book, every picture your child drew, every kitchen utensil, every knickknack you've ever picked up along the way, every, piece of mail and paper that you've accumulated. Office supplies. Right? You get the picture.

You pick up every single item, and there's a system to do it. Like you start with clothes first because that's like the easiest thing to get rid of. And then you go through all these things and you end with sentimental items, and you pick up every single item in your house and you ask yourself, does this spark joy?

And if it does, you keep it, and if it doesn't, you get rid of it. So, Tom and I did this, or I did this, and with Tom's permission, we did this, to our whole house. Every single household

item we went through. And I felt like for the first time, we were actually living this Bible passage, right?

This passage where Jesus says, don't store up these treasures. And it was such a freeing feeling to get to this point. And it's one thing to send loads and loads of things to goodwill, because Tom and I have always been good at that. My sisters and my mom and I, we used to when the kids were little, we'd have a garage sale every single year, and Tom and I would always sell the most stuff we like.

Yay! Look how much money we made. But that's because we were buying things that we just got rid of. And so it was one thing to just it once, one thing to get rid of things. But this whole another thing to stop buying things, to stop buying things that you that don't bring you joy, that stop buying things that you know is not that that that it's not going to last in, in a year.

Or two. It will not bring you joy. Don't bring it into your house. So, the other day, Lex, my youngest son was visiting from Omaha. I there was something and I said, hey, Tom, should we get rid of this? And Lex rolled his eyes and sarcastically said, I don't know. Does it bring you joy?

So I'm pretty sure I either. I either traumatized him because maybe we went a little too far, or maybe we taught him something about accumulating possessions and, not desiring for so much stuff. I'm hoping it's the latter one. Okay, we're not going to spend much time on that passage, because there is another passage in chapter six that is i probably more relevant.

Although we could argue about this stirring up treasure one. But this other passage is where Jesus talks about worry. So here's Jesus in Matthew chapter six, starting at verse 25. Therefore I say to you, don't worry about your life. What you'll eat or what you'll drink, or about your body. What you'll wear. Isn't life more than food? And what?

What food and the and food and the body. And the body more than clothes lock in again. Look what you guys have done to me, okay? Anyway. Just kidding. I'm just kidding. All of you. Okay. Look at the birds in the sky. They'd also seed or harvest grain or gather crops into barns. Yet your heavenly father feeds them.

Aren't you worth much more than they are? Who among you by worrying can add a single moment to your life? And why do you worry about clothes? Notice how the lilies in the field grow. They don't wear themselves out with work and they don't spin cloth. But I say to you that even Solomon, in all his splendor wasn't dressed like one of these.

If God dresses grass in the field so beautifully, even though it's alive today and tomorrow, it's thrown into the furnace, won't God do much more for you, you people of weak faith. Therefore don't worry and say, what are we going to eat? Or what are we going to drink? Or what are we going to wear? Gentiles long for these things.

Your heavenly father knows that you need them. I heard a quote the other day on a podcast that I cannot stop thinking about, and it was, the, podcast doctor Josh acts, and he had this guest on there on his show. He's a bestselling author and counselor. John. Eldridge. And he said this, your soul was actually never meant to know the news of the world.

And then he goes on to say, your brain was literally not created for, for omniscience. You were not meant to know the tragedy of the world. And we live in a 24 hour news kind of world. But we were not made to live with 24 hour news. Now, when we talk about the early church, or we think about the early church, we read about the early church.

Paul and the apostles, they traveled around and they traveled around and they created or formed these communities. And then they left and they were still connected a little bit, but they left. And these little church communities formed. And in these little church communities, generosity was overflowing. Right? These communities took care of one another. And I think, of course, you could take care of your community because community was only the people around you, your village or your neighborhood.

And maybe occasionally you'd hear about a disaster that happened in the neighboring village. But probably not very often you think about transportation, right? I'm going to only get the news to as far as I can walk or travel, and it's not probably very far. So if your neighbor's house burned down or someone was suddenly struck with a, an illness or a death in the family, like you knew about it, and you knew what to do to help them, like the whole town, the whole community, the whole church would step up and help out.

And now we're connected with so many people in so many ways, right? People that we went to elementary school and high school or people that we encountered one time. Right now we know what's going on in their in their lives, let alone, all the other things that we hear about on the news. Now, I know there are probably some grandparents who live far from their grandchildren, and they're probably really thankful for FaceTime and video chats and things that help us stay connected.

But sometimes we hear about a tragedy that happens in our very own neighborhood or in our church, and we think, it's just one more thing for me to worry about. What am I supposed to do about that? That's just one more thing. It's so overwhelm, meaning, with all the things happening in our world, how could we ever pick and choose what we're going to actually help with?

Now, I'm going to tell you, a fail of mine that happened to me recently. About a year ago, a fire broke out in my neighborhood, like just a few streets over somebody's house, completely burned down. I didn't know the family, but I heard about it, or I saw it, and I thought, man, we should do something to help, to help them.

And I thought about that multiple times. And then I think, well, I got to take care of my own family and my extended family and my friends and my church family. And like I, there's so much things that are happening in my world. And I didn't help that family, but I but I think I'm, I wonder what would happen if, if that was the only tragedy that I had heard about in the week or the month, like the only thing that oh man, that is a big thing, one big thing that happened in my neighborhood.

Of course, I would step up. I think that we need to make our worlds smaller in order to not worry. Like Jesus is telling us to do. So how do we apply what Jesus is saying to our world today? Jesus says, therefore don't worry. He's saying, therefore, don't worry about what you're going to eat, what you're going to wear, what don't worry about your life.

But then in Matt, in Matthew six, he says again. He says, instead desire first and foremost God's kingdom and God's righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore stop worrying about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble on its own. So Jesus says, if you don't want to worry, instead do this desire first and foremost God's kingdom and righteousness.

And so this brings me back to storing up treasures on earth. What are we seeking first in our lives? Right? If Jesus says, don't worry, and we're supposed to be seeking first Jesus's kingdom and righteousness, is that what we're doing every day of our life? Last Sunday, we did the daily examine together, and I encourage you to do that this week.

If you if you didn't get a chance to do it or you forgot, here's another reminder, because it really is a great way to pause and to be grateful and to just think about what's happening around you in your life. So this don't worry, don't be anxious kind of thing. This is hard. This is hard for us to actually live out in our life.

Imagine that you just got, like, the most tragic news. Maybe just, a devastating health diagnosis. Or maybe you just learned about the loss of a close family or friend, and somebody just says to you, don't worry about it. Right? We don't say that to people we don't like. Oh. Yeah. No, don't worry. Don't be anxious about that.

You know, in the in the 1970s, Bob Marley told us to don't worry about, about a thing. Every little thing's going to be all right. And in the late 80s, everybody was saying, don't worry, be happy. And then whistling and then the classic from the 20 tens. Let it go light, let it go. Don't worry about it.

But it's not that easy. It's not that easy. So in psychology there, there's this thing called the circles of worry. And it's called the circles of worry. Some call it the circles of control or the circles of influence and the circles of worry. Basically help you put into perspective of your life and what's happening around you. And so the first circle is titled things I Can't control.

I can't control the future. I can't control other people's actions. I can't control certain illnesses or natural disasters. I can't control world events. And then there's an action, right? What do we do? We release these things to God. We name them, we. We pray about them, and then we visualize placing them into God's hands and letting them go.

Jesus says, who among you can add a single moment to your life by worrying? And the answer is no one, right? So we think about these things, but then we let them go. Now I like to go to the rock climbing gym. And if you go to rock climbing gym and you go on to the really tall ones, you either do like self belaying or you're attached to someone that's basically a safety net.

So that you can come down safe safely and you climb all the way to the top. I think unlike climbing, gym is like 50ft. And I love that part. I love the climbing to the top. I do get nervous about halfway up I get nervous, but that that wise saying of don't look down, don't look down, right.

That helps. And I get to the top. And every single time I get to the top, the first time that I go, I get scared and I, and I look down and I say to whoever's with me, I can't do it. And they're like, yes, you can. And I'm like, no, I can't. And my family and friend courage encourages me and they say, yes, you can do it.

And eventually I do it. I let go and I safely arrive at the bottom, and then immediately I want to go again up to the same height. And then every time it gets easier and easier to let go. And that's the same way. When we are thinking about letting go of things that we have no control over, it's hard.

It feels impossible. It feels like we're going to fail, like we're going to it's not going to be in good, but we can do it. We can release things to God. And the more and more times we do it, the easier that it will get. Now the second circle is titled things I can influence, but not control. Things I can influence, but not control.

I can influence how I can not in. I cannot control how others receive my words. I cannot control the outcome of an effort or an event like an election. Right? I can influence it, but I cannot control the outcome. I cannot control, but I can influence my children's choices, whether they are adult children or littler children. They are their own beings, right?

You can influence them, but you cannot control them. Same with our parents and our friends and our siblings and others that we care deeply about. And so the action here is to act wisely and faithfully, but then let go of the outcome. We need to do our part. We need to influence how we can. We need to trust God.

Then with the rest of it. Proverbs three five through six says, trust in the Lord with with your heart. Don't rely on your own intelligence. Know him in your past and he will keep your pass straight. So, for example, you can teach your child to shower. You can buy the body wash, you can hang up the towel, you can teach them all the techniques.

You can even show them a YouTube tutorial video. But when they become teenagers, you cannot actually control whether they wash behind their ears or if they just stand with the water running over them, standing in a trance. You can influence them. You can love them, you can guide them. You can teach them, but you cannot control the outcome.

So you trust God. Now, the third circle is titled things I Can Control and this is where we need to spend our time. I can control my thoughts and my attitude. I can control how I treat others. I can control how I care for my body. I control how I spend my time and my money. I control my spiritual practices and how I connect with God.

So here is the action. We focus our energy here. This is where change begins to happen. We align our priorities with God's kingdom because Jesus says instead of worrying first desire God's kingdom and God's righteousness, that's what we do. First. So as these circles move, move outward, our control decreases, right? The things that we can't control and then the things we can influence.

But we still can't control, and then the things we can control as as the circles move outward, our control decreases. But our opportunity to trust God increases, because we have to let some of those things go and place them into God's hands and care. If you want to have the peace and calmness that Jesus is offering and you don't, you might have to change what you're doing.

I'm going to say that again. If you want to have this peace and calmness that Jesus is offering and you don't, you might have to change what you're doing. That may mean seeking professional help, making that doctor appointment to talk about your worry or your anxiety. It may mean taking medication. It may mean seeking a therapist or trying a new spiritual discipline, or a way to connect with God.

There are things that we can control to take control of our worry, and what works for a friend might not work for you, but you have to seek what works for you. But if you are in a cycle of worry, you probably need to change what you're doing. I heard a therapist once talk about anxiety as simply worrying about the future, right?

We're worrying about the future, and to stop the racing thoughts that we have in our mind. You need to. You need to stop them. You need to change what you're doing. Right. And she said you simply interrupt them. And she suggested doing, just counting down from five. Right. So your thoughts are racing and you need to you need to change them.

You need to stop them. You need to interrupt them. So you count down from five, five, four, three, two, one. And then you ask yourself, what if it all works out?

I'm worried about the direction of our country. I'm worried about the war. I'm worried about my parents. I'm worried about my children. Five, four. Three. Two. One. What if this all works out?

And I think, isn't that the message of Jesus? That in the end, it's all going to work out? That there's going to be life after this? It doesn't mean that today's not hard, but it's all going to work out. That death and tears and sadness and pain and suffering will be no more. Though those things couldn't stop Jesus and it.

And it shouldn't hold us either, if we let go and we trust God. What if this all works out? That's what our faith is all about. It's in the end that this is all going to work out. There are things that we can change. We can change how much we watch the news. We can replace that with how much we connect with our neighbor.

We can change how and when and how often we do spiritual disciplines. Reading the Bible, praying, studying. Together. We can change how often we pick up our phones and listen to the news of the world. We can change what treasures we seek. Now, I can tell you the best technique that's going to work for you. I wish I could.

I wish Jesus said, do not worry and then do exactly this. But yeah, he kind of did.

He kind of said, no, do not worry. And then he said instead, desire first and foremost, God's kingdom and righteousness. And then the last part of the verse says that God will give you what you need. So here is here's what we do. We focus on what's good and pleasing and and righteous. We focus on God's kingdom and what is to come.

And this kind of sums up the whole entire sermon on the Mount desire this God's kingdom, God's righteousness above anything else. Let's pray. Gracious God, Holy God, loving God. We, we. This is not easy. This is not easy to give up worry and to give up control. But God, that is what you desire for us. These are your words to us.

You want us to live a life without worry. But God, life is coming at us so fast that it is. It is seems nearly impossible to do this, nearly impossible to lay everything that we're worried about aside. But God, you make all things possible, that in the end, God everything will be

whole and right and good and we will go back to that garden like state, that beautiful state where we're living in harmony with one another and with you.

God. And so as we continue to seek your kingdom and seek your righteousness here on this earth, guide us, open our eyes and our hearts and our ears to what you are asking us to do in this world. Help us to desire first and foremost and only your kingdom and righteousness. And we say all of this in Jesus's name, Amen.