

“GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD”

Pastor Michael Jarick

There's a classic Aussie expression that I once heard 3 times in a day. I happened to be standing by my postbox when the postie made his annual visit. When he handed me a bundle of letters, and I said "Thanks" he replied, "No worries, mate!" Later, a tradesman was removing the boxing for the concrete foundations for a new fence. I gave him a couple of his steel pegs that I had found, and he said "No worries, mate!". Then, when I was paying for petrol, I asked the attendant if they accepted Diner's Card. You guessed it! "No worries, mate!" Isn't it great to have so few worries!

I must admit that I like this expression, indicating an easy-going, down-to-earth aspect of the traditional Aussie character. Although I like the expression, it has its limitations. For instance, although worry about the small things is indeed unproductive, there are bigger things that should grab our attention. So, whether one or the other of my credit cards is accepted is no big deal, but matters such as the shortage of affordable housing or the ongoing effects of the pandemic is something to be concerned about.

However, the greatest limitation to the expression concerns the reason why I shouldn't worry. What is the basis for my calm and peaceful demeanor, my lack of concern? Do I know something the other person doesn't? Am I able to divine the future, read tea leaves or palms, feel it in my waters?

Or, is "No worries" just a nice wish? If I close my eyes, and wish really, really hard, then like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz everything will be alright. There needs to be a reason, a basis in fact for why I don't need to worry, some substance behind, "No worries, mate!"

There is only one person who can truly say to you and me "No worries, mate!" Only one person has the ability and the right to assure us that we can be calm and peaceful, because everything is under control.

In the 4th Petition of the Lord's Prayer, Jesus says to us "Don't worry!" Why not? Because your Father in heaven knows what you need. He gives us our daily bread, even without our asking for it, even though we are sinful.

So why is it, when I look around me, and I look at myself, I see many Christians who are regularly worried about what is going to happen? Will my kids turn out alright? How will I be able to look after myself or my spouse when age catches up with me? Will I still have a job next year? Will my friends at school still accept me if they know I go to church? When will it start raining? When will it stop raining?

Let's consider where worry starts. Worry starts with fear. Fear itself is not automatically a bad thing. It is part of the survival instinct that God gave us. Without fear I doubt that any of us would survive long. We would be like toddlers standing on the edge of a busy road, without any sense of the danger and harm rushing past us.

Imagine, for instance, that no one had any fear whatsoever when driving to church – no fear of getting caught by the police for breaking the road rules, no fear of damaging your car or hurting other people, no fear of hurting or killing yourself.

We experience fear because we realize that someone or something very precious to us can be taken away from us in an instant. We experience worry when we allow those fears to overwhelm our faith in God. In my opinion, it is very helpful to distinguish these two related feelings. Fear is a normal and sensible human response to danger. Worry loses sight of God. Worry leaves God out of the picture.

St Paul reminds us in Philippians 4:5, “The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything.” When we worry, we are in effect saying to God “You’re powerless to help me. Not even you can do anything about the situation I’m in. Either that, or you just don’t care.”

In this 4th Petition of the Lord’s Prayer, we ask God to help us not to worry about our needs, but to trust him to provide for us. Don’t worry, trust! If God looks after the birds and the wildflowers, surely we can trust him to feed and clothe us, to provide for all our needs! Don’t worry, trust!

This can be hard for the rugged individual. Most of us like to think of ourselves as independent, not needing anyone else. I’m reminded of the Parable of the Rich Fool in Luke 12. He had such a good harvest that he decided to tear down his old barns in order to build bigger ones. Then he could take life easy – eat, drink, and be merry. But he forgot about God. That very night he died. What good was all his wealth when he was dead? Whatever good things we possess come to us because God loves us and is generous with us.

The fact that God provides for us doesn’t mean, though, that there is no role at all for us to play. God has made seed in such a way that when it is put in the ground with some moisture, it sprouts and grows. But it’s the farmer who cultivates the ground and controls the weeds and the pests in order to have a good harvest.

We aren’t baby birds in the nest, squawking away for our parents to hurry up and give us some food. It is good for us to work for our daily bread. Worrying about what might happen, though, indicates we don’t quite trust our Father in heaven.

A second matter suggested by this petition concerns being satisfied with what God gives us. Again, it is the attitude in our heart that counts. I could be entirely satisfied with an ancient VW beetle, resplendent in 3 colours, with a peace sign handpainted on the bonnet, and flowers on the doors, and that runs reliably when it feels like it. Conversely, I could be dissatisfied with my sleek and shiny Merc simply because a new model just came out.

It is a pleasure to meet people who are satisfied. They may have little. They may be working hard, but they are happy, because they are content with what they have, not bitter or anxious about what they don’t have. Only people who are satisfied can be thankful for what God has given them. In this petition, we ask that God helps us to be thankful for what he gives us.

One day a fisherman was lying on a beautiful tropical beach, his fishing rod propped up in the sand. He was looking forward to a nice fish for dinner. Along the beach came a businessman trying to relax after a stressful day. He wondered why the fisherman wasn't at work. "You aren't going to catch many fish that way," he said. "You should be working, not lying on the beach!"

The fishman smiled and replies "And what will my reward be?" "Well, you could buy more nets and catch more fish!" said the businessman. "And then what will my reward be?" asked the fisherman, still smiling. The businessman replied, "Well, you'd make money, and after a while you'd be able to buy a boat, which means you could catch even more fish!"

"And then what will my reward be?" The business was beginning to get a little irritated now with the fisherman's question. He said, "You could buy a bigger boat, and hire people to work for you!" He waited for the fisherman's response. Sure enough – "And then, what will my reward be?"

The businessman thought to himself "What an idiot!" He couldn't hide his anger anymore. "So you could build up a fleet of fishing boats, sail all around the world, and let your employees catch fish for you!" And what does the fisherman say, still smiling – "And then what will my reward be?" The businessman was red with rage: "Don't you understand anything, you fool? You'll become so rich that you will never have to work for the rest of your life. You can spend your days sitting on the beach watching the sun set! You won't have a care in the world!" The fisherman was still smiling. "And what do you think I'm doing now?"

Our daily bread comes to us from our loving Father in heaven. It's ours to use wisely, to supply our needs and the needs of others, rather than for us to hoard or squander. Because God is the real owner, we use what we have in a way which expresses our thanks to God.

Plenty of people tell us "No worries, mate!" The only one who can truly say this is our Heavenly Father. Rather than worry, he invites us to trust him. He will provide what we need. We ask him to help us to trust him, and to be satisfied with what he provides. Amen.