

Consider the lilies

A sermon preached by the *Revd Tim Bravington* at the 10.00am service at St Peter's, Wolvercote on Sunday 27th February 2011

Genesis ch.1 v.1 – ch.2 v.3; Matthew ch.6 vv.25 - end

Consider – there is something slow about considering.

Consider – the wonder of creation, described so beautifully in the opening words of Genesis.

Consider – the whole creation groaning, as Paul puts it, for it is by hope that we are saved – in hope, in patience, as we eagerly wait for our salvation.

Consider – the lilies, snow drops, crocuses, daffodils. Aren't they lovely? On your way home, or when you get home, pause for as long as you can to **consider** them and think of all that Jesus teaches us.

I also thought of the March Lily. It comes up in March, of course, both in the lush fynbos near Cape Town and also in the arid sand of Namaqualand. You can't see where the bulb is until the fleshy foot-long stalk comes up, bearing a pinkish, trumpet-like flower, and this in autumn, a harbinger of cooler, wetter days to come.

But Jesus asks us to look at a different kind of lily.

Imagine we are sitting with a great crowd of people on the grass in the coomb, the traditional site of the Sermon on the Mount, with the church of the Beatitudes nearby. We won't see snow drops, crocuses, daffodils, March Lilies. We wouldn't burn such thick fleshy stemmed things in our oven so we could bake bread anyway. But look closely among the scrubby grass and we will find flowers, scarlet poppies and anemones, which bloom for one day on the hillsides of the Holy Land. Here today, gone tomorrow, more beautiful than Solomon in all his glory today, heating the bread oven tomorrow. We are being taught to look further than transient beauty. Do not worry.

'Take no thought' is perhaps not the most helpful translation. Jesus is not encouraging a 'reckless neglect for the future' as Bishop Lightfoot put it. So that lets the Fund Raising Committee off the hook, and Jackie making sure the choir know when to come to choir practice, and the Vicar asking clergy when they can assist with services and sending out the quarterly rota, and people doing administrative work in the parish.

I suppose we all of us worry about things some, or even all, of the time. When we are worried about something we could try looking for Jesus in whatever it is we are worrying about. We could also just offer it to Jesus in prayer. I don't think Jesus is forbidding us from worrying or judging us out of court. I think he is teaching us to **consider**, stop and think. Remember the song, 'What's the use of worrying? It never was worthwhile'.

So what is Jesus teaching us to **consider** about worrying?

If God gave us life, we can trust him for the things which are necessary to support life. We can learn from the birds. They work hard, but they do not worry. We can worry as much as we like but it won't make us grow any taller, nor will it make us live any longer – more likely the opposite. If God gives such beauty to a short-lived flower, how much more will he care

for us humans? Surely God's generosity, which is so lavished on the one day flower, will not be withheld from us humans, the crown of creation.

Jesus goes on to argue that worry is a characteristic of someone who does not know God. Worry is essentially lack of trust in God, but we have learned to call God by the name of Father. The Christian need not worry because we believe that God loves us.

Jesus suggests two ways in which we can defeat worry. Seek **first** the Kingdom of God, do the will of God. Worry is banished when God becomes the dominating power of our lives. God loves us. **Second**, live one day at a time, without worrying about the unknown future and the things which may never happen. With God, we can be content with what is at hand, and anxiety for tomorrow is foolish because the compassionate Father in heaven is Lord of the future. I remember being nervous about visiting people. I was encouraged when I remembered that Jesus was not only with me but also with the people on the other side of the door. He continually gives us grace to cope.

This teaching about trusting in God comes just after Jesus' teaching about prayer. We could think of this later in the service as we pray the Lord's Prayer together, asking, for example, not for food for the next week, month or year, but 'give us today our daily bread'. Incidentally, both the Lord's Prayer and Jesus' teaching about not worrying are addressed to us in the plural.

There is this immediacy in God's love for us. Thank God for his love. **Consider**, trust, don't worry. God loves us.