

Well, I hope you are up for some good news and some bad news today. . .

The bad news is that our stretch of Ordinary Time after the Christmas season – is over – and Lent begins on Wednesday.

The good news is that we have learned some important lessons from Jesus the master teacher over the last few weeks --- lessons, that if we carry them into Lent – can make the coming forty days a time to truly transform our lives.

So we have learned in the Beatitudes Jesus gives us – lessons – that if lived well, can give meaning and purpose to our lives.

We can find that in helping others heal their pain and brokenness, we can also heal our own.

We can find that as we mourn, hunger and thirst for righteousness, make peace with others and endure persecution for our beliefs – that Jesus is not just one of many options for us – but THE option for the way we pattern our lives.

We have learned that we are all called to be fireflies – because we shine from within. Our gifts might go completely unnoticed – our triumphs may be quiet and unsuspecting – but we are called to let our inner light shine – and also to encourage the light of others to shine-forth – so we will be the light of the world.

We have learned that our choices -- define us. Our choices – reveal our values. Our choices – determine our character. And that we can transform our lives by making wise, kingdom-centered, and life-giving choices.

And we have learned that while we should do our best to break free of human excesses – like too much eating, drinking, or spending --- God wants us to practice forgiveness, mercy, love and care --- so much, so excessively – that we become perfect at them.

And what lesson does today bring??? To use a line from a song made famous by Bobby McFerrin in the early 1980s: Don't worry, be happy!

The subtle enemy of faith – is not materialism or greed. It is not anger, lust or hypocrisy. NO, all of these sins are certainly our enemies – but the most notorious faith killer in all of life is ----worry. “therefore I tell, 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 clothing? Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your life-span?”

Being somewhat of a wordsmith, I found the origins of the word “worry” a bit interesting. . .

The German word for worry means “to strangle”. And the Greek word for worry means “to divide the mind.”

Both are accurate. Worry is a noose on the neck and a distraction of the mind – both of which keep us from fully placing our faith in God – trusting in the way God wants to lead us – instead of the way we might want to go.

Worry is a destructive force that never helps solve problems, but adds stress and often hinders finding solutions. And worry is not intended to be a part of God's plan for our lives. . .

Once shortly before a major concert before a standing room only audience, a member of Arturo Toscanini's orchestra approached the great Italian conductor with an expression of sheer terror on his face.

“Maestro,” the musician fretted, “my instrument is not working properly. I cannot reach the note of E-flat. Whatever will I do? We are to begin in just a few minutes.”

Toscanini looked at the man with utter amazement. Then he smiled kindly and placed an arm around his shoulders.

“My friend,” the maestro replied, “Do not worry about it. The note E-flat does not appear anywhere in the music that you will be playing this evening.”

If we were to keep a record of all the things we worried about during a given period of time, we would discover – in reviewing them – that the great majority of our anticipated problems or troubles never come to pass.

This means that the time we devote to worrying, even the constructive kind that prompts us to try to come up with a solution to what is troubling us, is wasted. Thus, we not only caused ourself unnecessary mental anguish, but also took up valuable minutes and hours that could have been spent elsewhere.

Perhaps Winston Churchill stated it best – “when I look back, I realize I had a lot of worry about things in life – most of which never happened.”

“Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your life span?”

There is, of course, a difference between worry and concern. A worried person only sees problem lurking everywhere – and just stewes over them.

But the concerned person, if they see problems, work at solving them.

Perhaps we can all be more concerned, and less worried, by praying the serenity prayer a bit more often:

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change.

The courage to change the things I can.

And the wisdom to know the difference.