

The challenges get greater! Rather than choosing a parable to look at - this time we were asked to choose a passage that had influenced or impacted our lives.

There is one verse that has meant more and more to me over the years – and that was our first very short reading from Psalm 46, verse 10 – Be still and know that I am God.

I used to be a very anxious person, worried about everything and particularly what others would think of me. I would find it difficult to express my views in front of others and found it incredibly difficult to speak up in front of anyone.

As my faith has grown I have come to realise that it really doesn't matter what others think about you – and as Philippians Chapter 4, verse 6 says “do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”

And in 1 Peter Chapter 5 verse 7 it reminds us “cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you”.

Worrying about things, running different scenarios with different calamitous outcomes through in your head can't and won't change anything – it actually often makes it far far worse and the anxiety just grows.

I have learnt to actively share all my worries and concerns with God through my prayers and it really helps. I learnt to recognise those things that can't be changed by worrying about them and instead have handed them up to God and I really have found peace – anxiety has reduced as God has given me his peace via the Holy Spirit.

Over recent years I have managed to keep calm and together in the most stressful of personal situations dealing with the care of close relatives - as I handed all my stress over to God to deal with and trusted and knew that he was holding me in the palm of his hand and often even carrying me!

By handing over all our worries to God we are helping ourselves and those around us – we aren't weighed down by our own worries and internal concerns – inward facing and self-focused - instead we can be present and able to help those around us.

Much of our stress is brought on by our need to know everything ahead of time – to be in control. Even after we pray and turn the concern over to God we are still tempted to fret about it. But think about this - when we put our money in the bank we don't stay awake at night worrying that it's still there. We know it's in there. We need to have the same confidence in God. When we find ourselves in the downward spiral of what, when, how, where, if, etc – just stop and give it to God again.

This isn't an easy habit to get into but like everything it requires practice – remember all athletes and sportspeople practice – whether golfers, footballers or gold medal winning olympians. And all musicians practice – playing the same piece - over and over again until it's perfected. We need the same dedication in our relationship with God.

Think of the times we are waiting in a queue, stuck on hold waiting to get through on the phone, sitting in a traffic jam or at the wonderful level crossing lights on the A30 –

We can use these moments with God. Thank him for the good things, ask him for help with the difficult things, seek his help, his forgiveness.

It's recorded that Jesus prayed continuously at all times and about all things – he prayed before calling the disciples to follow him and at the transfiguration, in the garden of Gethsemane and on the cross – and he said grace before the feeding miracles, at the last supper and after his resurrection at the supper in Emmaus. If our aim is to be more Christ-like we too should be praying at all times and about everything.

Now the other passage that I feel a personal connection with is today's Gospel reading the story of Mary and Martha in Luke Chapter 10.

With my background in event organisation and my years as church warden I think I have always completely identified with Martha. I want to ensure that everything is just so, that it all runs smoothly and everyone can engage in whatever activity they are at – whether it's a conference or a service.

I felt sad that Martha was reprimanded by Jesus for doing just that. This was until very recently when I realised that I had missed the point of Jesus's criticism of Martha.

It wasn't about what she was doing but that she was "distracted" and "worried and upset about many things" and bothered about what Mary was or wasn't doing. Martha should have been making the most of being in Jesus' presence. He was actually telling her "Be still and know that I am God".

He wants us to be productive but he always wants us to be able to rest and enjoy fellowship in Him! Not to be distracted by other things. If we are too absorbed in the doing we lose sight of who we are called to be.

God also doesn't want us to worry about what others are doing – it's between them and him. What matters is our own relationship with God. He wants to hear our prayers, to comfort us. Good or bad, happy or sad, nervous or joyous - he wants all of us to 'Be still and know that I am God'.

So what might we take away today? For many of us our default mode is to worry. Something happens and before we're even conscious of it we start to worry and fret about what it could mean and what might happen. It's a slow process - but commit each time this happens to take the new event you're worried about directly to God and immediately – not after you've spent a few hours fretting about it. Tell him everything it's making you imagine and all the possible outcomes you've envisaged. Then practice faith – say "Lord, I've told you what is happening and everything that I fearfully imagine, I'm going to try and leave it with you."

Hand it all over, ask our Heavenly Father to be in, and through and over everything we are concerned about. Ask him to resolve all those things we can't fix by worrying.

So let's end in prayer: Dear Lord help us to remember to hand over all our worries into your safe hands and to allow your peace to fill our hearts and minds. Allow us to be still and know that you are God.

Amen

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