

*The Red Thread*  
Matthew 6: 25-34

Two thousand, one hundred and 90 large, thin crust, pepperoni pizzas. That's what 82 year old Jean Wilson ordered over the last three years. In case you didn't hear the report, every single day for the last three years, now-82 year old Jean Wilson ordered two large, thin crust pepperoni pizzas and two diet cokes. That's 17, 520 slices of Domino's finest.

She was the first called-in order of every day. But this past Monday, the call didn't come through. For three days, Mrs. Wilson's delivery woman wondered what happened to her favorite customer. The Domino's delivery woman told her manager, "Clock me out if you need to, but I'm going to find out what's going on."

A few raps on the windows and door led her to dial 911. When the emergency crew opened the door, there was Mrs. Wilson. She'd fallen Sunday night, and she couldn't get up. If you're one to worry about a woman who'd eat nothing but pizza every single day for three years, worry no more.

She's thankin' God for her kooky, culinary habit! And as she looks back on her faithful pizza consumption, we might laugh, but she knows having Dominos pizza delivered every day actually may have saved her life. Think about that the next time you go for your cholesterol check.

And so I will continue to say that as each of us looks back on our lives we can probably see times where the going got pretty worrisome. We can see rough patches where our pathways twisted and turned in strange directions. We can identify worry-filled patterns and our own version of pizza eating habits that in the moment seemed all out of whack.

But over time, can it seem to be the case now, that it's now with the benefit of time that we can eventually see how even the twists and turns, rough places and patterns, how the journey of our lives actually do make sense. You and I have **been** exactly where we've **been meant** to be, and we **are** exactly where we **are meant** to be. We've been **doing** exactly what God **intends for us to be doing**, in exactly the way that God intends it...**all** by the grace of God...to get us to where we are right now. By

the grace of God, you and I are living into the moment that God needs for each of us to know. **So don't worry!**

I'd like to think that each of us can go through life, look back at any point and be able to see what I'll call a kind of Red Thread running through it. I mean, if you and I think of ourselves as an enormous sheet of simple, lightweight fabric flowing this way and crumpled that, I'd like to think that through each inch of fabric, whether it's right side up or down, a Red Thread is visible through it.

For me, this Red Thread represents an image of God visible in my life of ups and downs, twists and turns. This Red Thread reveals for us the interweaving of God's gracious involvement in our lives. This Red Thread weaves together youth group meetings, and summer camp, MATE Mission Trips and college internships, each new job – and each lost job, our volunteer experiences, our moves there and back, our relationships, our heartbreaks, or winning lottery tickets and more to bring each of us to the day when we would be sitting with this very church. This Red Thread is a symbol of the evidence of God persistently moving through our lives.

**Seeing** this Red Thread through each experience of life – the very best ones, and maybe even more importantly, the very hardest ones – proves to us that God has been preparing us for this moment when we now can say that it is only now, upon reflection, that all of our life **has been of God** who is weaving our parts carefully together, strengthening our fiber and guiding us home.

This Red Thread of God, so visible dare we look, is building our confidence and trust that God will help us continue through future trials and joys. This Red Thread is what we can see when we reflect upon our strange and twisted pathways in life and ultimately conclude that it all made sense.

And so Jesus tells us not to worry.

In today's scripture reading from his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gives us four reasons why we can **dare** to be so free from worry. Verse 26: worry is unnecessary. Look at the birds of the air. God feeds them. Do you really think God won't feed you?

Verse 27: worry is useless. Can you even add an hour to your life by worrying?

Verses 28-29: worry is blind. Can you not see the evidence of God's care?

Verse 30: worry shows a lack of faith. If God will do so much for even a blade of grass, how much more will God do for God's own children?

So when Jesus tells us not to worry, he's telling us not to worry because it's unnecessary, useless, blind, and faithless. But to be worry-free doesn't mean that we should live simply carefree or happy lives. Jesus certainly isn't implying that the very real pressures of the world are trivial.

Who knows what Colonel Gaddafi will command next? The people in Libya today have little room to be carefree. Contributions to the CFA are definitely down while the need is dramatically up. The people in line at the CFA during this protracted economic crisis have little room to be carefree. The several among us here in worship that have received difficult diagnoses for ourselves or our family members. We have little room to be carefree.

Rather, when Jesus tells us not to worry, he's telling us to live in confident reliance on God knowing that through God's grace, we can dare hope that our life in God is secure and certainly makes sense. Even when you've got a strange, pizza-eating habit like 82 year old Jean Wilson. To conclude that Jesus meant for us to have a more carefree attitude or a posture of uncritical bliss is to rob ourselves of the opportunity to live into witness of the Red Thread of God in our own lives. To conclude from the text that we're being encouraged to live a simple, carefree, blissfully worry-free life is to make the text about a change in lifestyle – **which it is not.**

Instead, I want to impress upon you the need for each of us to conclude from this melodic text that we can trust that God is in our lives, continually creating something new in each one of us and thereby creating something new in the world every day. **Look back** for the Red Thread in your life and **see** that God has been **ever-present**, so that each negative experience and each positive one has been re-creating us to be the sort of Christian character God requires in order for the world to become the kingdom God longs for it to be.

I would hope that seeing the witness of God in our lives will lead us away from worry, not only about temporal things but even about eternal ones. We won't worry about whether or how we're going to make it through life on earth or even into life eternal realizing Jesus' promise that all these things will

be given to us as well. (Actually, whether we are going to be saved is rendered irrelevant as a day-to-day concern; rather, what God is trying to create in us becomes our paramount one.)

This idea was driven home for me last Sunday when I was reading an article about Tina Brown in last Sunday's New York Times. If you don't know much about Tina Brown, she's the publishing world's shining star who, at 25, took over the London *Tatler* and quickly quadrupled its circulation. And at 30, was running Vanity Fair – hiring Annie Leibovitz to shoot the provocative photos that re-characterized the magazine. And at 38, took over the *New Yorker* and breathed new life into the iconic publication. And, not too many years ago, took the helm of *TALK* magazine that in spite of her talent and experience was left to fold. But who, at 57, faces today what is arguably her tallest task: to head-up the once popular *Newsweek* print publication in the midst of an exciting electronic age. Reflecting on Brown's capacity to meet this incredible challenge, her former colleague at Vanity Fair said, "Whether it can be saved is irrelevant. What is to be created is the task."

It seems like a great application for our own lives, doesn't it? We can't worry about whether or how we're going to make it through the day to day troubles of life on earth or what we perceive to be our potential to enter into eternity. **Only God knows whom God saves.**

True to our Calvinist tradition, Presbyterians believe that we are to live our lives reflective of God's kingdom and righteousness; and God will save whom God chooses. This leaves us to live without worry and to live into what God is trying to create in us.

As you look back through your life – all the twists and turns of your life – where do you find the Red Thread of God weaving in and out, leading you to this very place today – right here to your pew at First Pres?

As you look back at what might have been the worries of your day, how can you see where God was moving you through on a very important journey? In the process of all of your experiences, what has God created in you? Who have you become through your journey of a lifetime? I know that once we can see for ourselves how God is ever-present, our trust in "god for us" will be emboldened and we will be able to move confidently through whatever challenges would otherwise threaten to leave us in tatters.

Trust is an important word here, because trust removes our worries. But just as Jesus wasn't preaching to us to live a more simple, carefree, blissfully worry-free life, Jesus wasn't preaching to simply give us confidence in God. Jesus was preaching to us so that we would trust and obey. (Remember that old Sunday School song?)

When we trust in and are grateful for God's involvement in our lives, we will begin to live as a faithful witness to God's weavings in us, we will live our lives with others extravagantly to match God's extravagant involvement with us. We will live our lives creatively with one another, in excitement for what God intends to do with us in the world. We will live our lives modeling for and witness to the life of Christ for someone who needs it most.

As we consider the myriad possibilities for directing our witness in the world, it would be easy to either begin to spray our faithfulness across the board so that it actually leaves a fine, however ineffectual, mist all before us. But I'm going to follow the lead of a fine, Baptist pastor, Andy Stanley, and suggest that each of us identify one person we can help in a way we'd like to help every single one. He says, "Do for one what you'd like to do for everyone." **Do for one what you'd like to do for everyone.**

Get involved in one person's life in a way that she can feel it deeply. Persist in showing God's love with one man/woman/child in a way that she or he can't help but know that she or he is a purposeful member of God's creation. Be relentless in sharing the gifts God has given you with the one whom God has placed before you. Be a part of God's creative work in this world by helping another of God's creation to experience this Red Thread weaving through his or her life. When she hits a bump in the road, help her to not dwell on the bump in a worrisome way. Instead, help her to work through how God might be using all of her experiences to help her live into God's creative purpose for her.

And as you and I live our lives together with God and another God places in our path, may we leave behind our worries of the world to trust in our God who is a bold Red Thread graciously involved in every facet of our lives. May we obey God by becoming a witness for another to God's Red Thread in her life so that that person, too, can trust in God's gracious involvement in every facet of her world. And may we all come to live our lives in faithful dedication to the one who is continually encouraging us all to become a new creation.

Thanks be to God.