

“Considerations”  
Luke 12:22-34 (or 13-34)  
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Whatever happened to the carefree summer we were hoping for? Last week’s issue of *Businessweek* touted “The Case for Optimism.” I don’t know about you, but I’m not hearing the champagne corks yet, nor are there choruses belting out Bobby McFerrin’s “Don’t worry, be happy.” It’s just not that easy.

It’s been a summer of worry. The temperatures may have been low, the humidity indicators reasonable, but the anxiety level? Sky high.

Most of us have been worrying about the economy. Even with the Dow edging up toward five digits, we are jittery about long-term signs like housing starts, unemployment rates and the national debt.

Some of us have been worrying about deadlines and pressures. Those of us who are working have more on our plate than ever before. Pressures for productivity, deep staffing cuts, and competition for work have been taking their toll.

Some of us have been worrying about our household finances. Though we do not talk about it much – not in this town anyway – every week at least one person comes to my office with devastating news. Many are worrying about losing their job, their income, or even, in some cases, their homes.

And some have been worrying about losing the people we love. Marriages are strained in far too many of our homes. And terminal illnesses have not stopped taking their toll. The grief is tangible.

Thanks be to God not everyone has been so overwhelmed by worries. Blessed are you who are immune! But for the rest of us, it is not so easy to lay our worries down. Today I want to offer tools to help us try. Those tools are framing, filters and focus ... and to illustrate, let’s direct our attention to this

beautiful painting by Sue MacFarlan, which she contributed for our Liturgical Arts Ministry.



The children have helped start us already during the Word for Children, and I want to focus us on this painting now. Though this is obvious, the first thing I want to focus us on is the fact that this painting does not take up the whole chancel. The painting has boundaries; it has a frame – which is something we all need.

Some of you may have seen the article recently in the newspaper that talked about multi-taskers. There was a study done about multi-tasking, and the people who did the study expected that multi-taskers were able to focus quickly on things and to filter out unnecessary information. Guess what? The opposite was true. Those who have more than one medium going on at a time, those who had television, and newspaper and/or computer and/or iPod – anybody with more than one medium going on at the same time had *more* trouble focusing on *anything* and could not filter out those things that were irrelevant. We need - we humans - we need a frame and boundary, lest we miss everything. We cannot, contrary to popular opinion, focus on everything all at the same time. We miss the trees for the forest. We need to have a boundary. We need to have a frame.

The second thing we need is a filter to figure out what it is we need to focus on. I adore what Sue did with this picture. In spite of the fact that the lily is the focal-point of the painting, the children picked up on what else is in the picture. At one corner there is a Bible, and at another there is a church. For us to figure out what's most important to focus on, we need a filter. We need some cues to draw our attention to what is important and what is not. Sue has offered us this filter of church and scripture to focus us on the things that really matter.

We all have filters that we use. We have filters, for example, of the Wall Street Journal, which I read every day. But when I use that filter what I focus on is not a lily, what I focus on is the Dow Jones Industrial Average and how my investments are doing. If we were to use a filter like a women's magazine that has beautiful people on the cover and lots of information inside about dieting and exercising – and in the back, has luscious recipes for high calorie, high fat desserts - if we had that, then the center of the picture would be our attempt to be a perfect woman according to our culture.

Instead, the filter that Sue used was this: she used the Bible and she used a church. That is what Jesus invites us to do as we filter the things that matter and the things that do not. It used to be in our culture that most people had those tools, those filters with them all the time. But that is not so anymore. Most of the culture is secularized now; we don't filter things automatically through those pieces. But Jesus invites us to remember to pick up the filter of Scripture in order to see what really matters. Jesus invites us to come into the doors of the church to be with other people trying to figure out what the Kingdom of God really looks like – what's really important to our time and to our labor.

So, we need a frame, we need filters, and finally, we need a focus.

All of us have myriad foci to consider, and it is well that we do....it is normal that we do. We have considerations over our finances, we have considerations over our family's well being, we have considerations over our political affiliations and things that are happening in our world of the healthcare debate and our world of financial policy. We all have myriad considerations to juggle all the time.

But all of us also have access to God's creation, which points us to another focus. John Calvin once said that it doesn't matter whether you have even ever heard of the Lord God; you will have access to see who God is if you just open your eyes to the nature that is right in front of you. Now I don't know about you, but when I take the time to go out to Lake Michigan and actually focus on those beautiful waves, it is hard for me to forget the hand of

the Lord our God. But if I stay in, glued to my computer screen all the time, it is another matter. I don't know about whether you ever wander in the woods or in a garden, but I know that when I do, the flowers that I see in that garden remind me of God's hand and the beauty God intended for every creature, including you and me. This is how I know the way that the Lord provides for us.

What is it you spend your time focusing on? Each one of us has things we think about all the time. I remember when I was in Oregon it startled me that I stopped thinking about work the moment I woke up and started thinking about and focusing on my family. Each of us has worries we think about all the time, things we consider that stir in our thoughts. But if we allow ourselves to consider the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, the hand of God in the lake, the beauty of one another in this gorgeous congregation of children of God, then perhaps, we can lay some of those other worries down. We all have considerations. And Jesus invites us to consider this: to consider the lilies of the field, to consider the birds of the air, to consider the generous and providential hand of God.

We lost one of our saints a couple of weeks ago. Many of you were here for Millicent Kreischer's memorial service. Millicent had the capacity to love without guile, to be transparent with the mercy of Christ. How did she do it? She chose her considerations, she chose her focus. Every single morning without fail, she would wake up and light a candle and start to pray, letting God know what was on her mind, sharing with God what was on her heart. That time with God focused her for the rest of the day.

I love to reflect on what Millicent spent her time focusing on, what considerations occupied Millicent's life. It is no accident that one of the Scripture lessons she chose for her memorial service was the ending of Philippians (paraphrased):

*Beloved in Christ, think about these things:*

*whatever is good,*

*whatever is noble,*

*if there is any excellence,*

*if there is anything worthy of praise,*

*think about these things.*

*And the God of peace will be with you.*

Considerations. You can worry if you want, but I'd rather consider the lilies of the field. Amen.