

Letting go of fear, embracing the kingdom

All-age resources

Material for all ages together to supplement the ecumenical worship service

Links to video or song resources are for the benefit of those preparing to use the resources and are not to be publicly played unless the user has the appropriate license and copyright permissions.

Gather

Use the activity and prayer to gather and introduce the theme.

Carrying our worries

- Before the service, place tokens around the room to represent worries. These tokens can be anything from bits of paper/card to buttons. Ask the congregation to move around the space and pick up as many 'worries' as they feel represents how they are feeling.
- When finished, ask them to reflect on the 'worries' in their hands. Do their 'worries' feel heavy or light? Do they feel like they are carrying a big worry or lots of little worries? Is there one big worry with lots of little worries attached?
- Explain how today we're thinking about how Jesus does not want us to worry. He is the Good Shepherd who gathers his flock, so they are not struggling through life alone. We are called as Christians across different faith communities to unite with one another and God, so we do not need to be afraid.
- Finally, invite them to place their worries at the front – it could be in front of a cross/altar or something that represents them laying the worries down at God's feet.

Call to worship

Whether we feel close to God (*bring palms together*)
Or far from God (*stretch hands wide*)
Whether we feel alone (*hold one finger up*)
Or close to people (*interlock fingers of hands together*)
May we know the Spirit bringing us close to God today (*place hand on heart*).
Amen.

A gathering prayer

Father God,
we all carry worries today;
some we can name,
others we can't.
You know our worries.
Thank you that you do not ask us to carry our fears by ourselves.
Draw us close to you.
May we know your love and strength.
Amen.

Share the Word

Luke 12:22-34

You will need: pens and paper.

- Start by reading verses 22-26. As you read the passage, ask everyone to write down the five most common things they think people worry about. Then ask them to get into small groups and compare their lists. How similar were the lists?
- Then, read verses 27-31. Ask everyone to discuss in their groups if there is a difference between worry and being sensible? Is there a difference between worry and planning ahead?
- Then, read verses 32-34. Ask everyone to individually reflect on if there are any worries that stop them from following Jesus wholeheartedly. If they were to never worry again, would that change how they live out their faith?

Bible notes

Luke 12:22-34

Jesus starts by telling the disciples not to worry about food, clothing or even life itself. To illustrate his point, Jesus points to the lilies and the birds, reminding us of our place within God's creation and of God's wholly encompassing care for that creation. We are neither the exclusive beneficiaries of God's love, nor are we excluded from it.

It is helpful to place this passage in its wider context. Preceding it is the warning given through the Parable of the Rich Fool (vv.13-21). His crime is not the storing up itself, but his failure to be 'rich towards God' (v.21). In other words, he credits himself for his own success and does not give thanks to God for the bounty of his harvest.

In contrast, verses 22-34 present us with a situation of scarcity, or the fear of scarcity at least, and draw out the response to which our faith ought to lead us. These passages have in common the theme of God's riches towards us, whether they are immediately obvious or not.

These two passages posit an abundance-scarcity dichotomy that dialogues with the scarcity and abundance we see around us. Together the passages emphasise that we should trust in God through abundance and scarcity, and one of the ways we demonstrate that trust is to 'strive for the kingdom' together, as one 'little flock' (vv.32). Whatever our situation as individual churches, it is not a sign of God's favour or displeasure towards us; rather our understanding of God's perspective on the Church universal should be informed by our understanding of God's perspective on creation: holistic, universal and non-exclusionary.

Sermon ideas

Highlight how the Bible readings explore the importance of letting go of fear and embracing the kingdom.

Sermon starter 1: Crossing over

Belfast is famously a divided city. Yet this is changing, and churches are involved in trying to reduce these fears and prejudices and offer hope instead. A wonderful example of this is the '4 Corners Festival' started by Fr Martin Magil and Rev. Steve Stockman – a Catholic priest and Presbyterian minister – who, after visiting each other, realised they had never been in the other's part of the city before. This led them to set up an arts festival that encourages people to travel to areas of the city they might rarely visit. This festival, organised by Catholics, Presbyterians, Anglicans, Methodists and others, gathers people together and offers hope over fear and worry. Trusting in God's provision for our needs helps us to step out of what's familiar and experience the richness of different expressions of worship, art, culture and community.

Sermon starter 2: Command or invitation?

If there was a big red button at the front of the room with a sign saying, 'DO NOT PRESS', how tempted would you be to press it? Often, when we are ordered not to do something, we are tempted to do the opposite. Being told not to worry can be a powerful way to remind someone of all their worries! Yet, when Jesus tells us not to worry, perhaps it's less a command and more an invitation. What can we, across our different faith communities, offer others to help reduce their worries?

Sermon starter 3: Letting go of fear

Jesus starts by telling the disciples not to worry about food, clothing, or life itself. He points to lilies and birds, reminding us that the same God who cares for creation cares even more for the little flock. When churches compete for resources or influence, pride and fear take the lead. Recognising that God provides for every branch of his household frees us to share rather than hoard — for example, by co-funding community outreach projects, or simply celebrating one another's gifts without envy. Letting go of fear of scarcity or decline enables churches to collaborate on social justice, evangelism, and worship without seeing one another as rivals. Sharing buildings for worship with other Christian communities and gratefully offering sanctuary to those who have no home can offer a foretaste of the reconciled unity in diversity for which we pray.

Sermon starter 4: Embracing the kingdom

'Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.' Jesus reframes royal terminology into an invitation: our true treasure isn't in buildings or budgets or politics, but in the reign of God — visible in mercy, justice, and mutual care. In ecumenical settings, differing liturgies or doctrines can feel like competing claims to 'the kingdom'. Such diversity can also be an asset. Focusing on shared values, such as hospitality and forgiveness, shifts attention from our distinct traditions toward the one reality we are called to embody together.

Explore & respond

Key to Spiritual styles: **W**ord, **E**motion, **S**ymbol, **A**ction

Canadian scholar Joyce Bellous identified four pathways of spiritual expression in her books *Educating Faith and Conversations that Change Us*. David Csinos, a former student of Bellous, used these styles as a framework in his research into the spiritual lives of children. Find more in www.rootsforchurches.com/spiritual-styles-intro.

A sequence of active worship ideas; individual items can stand alone.

Gather the flock

E S

A game about being known

You will need: cotton wool.

- Before the service, hide 50 'sheep' (pieces of cotton wool) around the church.
- Invite everyone to go and look for the sheep, and time how long it takes for everyone to gather in the flock.
- Talk about how the image of the Good Shepherd is used throughout the Bible to remind us that God knows us and cares for us. Does knowing this help to make you feel less worried?

Hear the birds

E A

A meditation on God's care

You will need: the means to play some music.

-  Play some bird song. The Natural History Museum has a webpage with links to common British bird song <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/bird-song-identification-common-garden-birds.html>.
- See if anyone in the congregation recognises what bird is singing. We might not all be brilliant at knowing the birds, never mind taking care of them. But God knows and cares for each of us.
- Continue to play the birdsong while people sit and pray. Invite them to first pray for any worries they might have, and then to pray for the different churches across Britain and Ireland.

Paint the flowers

W E

An art activity about God's care for us.

You will need: paper, straws, bowls, paint, spoons, pens.

- Give everyone some paper and a straw and put out different bowls of paint (two parts water to one part acrylic paint) with spoons.
- Then, invite everyone to use the spoons to dab blobs of paint onto their paper and then to blow through their straw to create images that look like flowers.
- Encourage a discussion around how each of us is different and beautiful and precious to God. That is the same for us as individuals, but also as faith communities.
- Once the painting is dry, finish by writing a prayer for another local church in your area that will bless and enrich them.

Carry the burdens

S A

A physical example of how working together makes us stronger.

You will need: A large object.

- Choose an object in your space which would be too heavy for one person to lift but could be safely lifted by a group of people.
- Ask for some volunteers to carefully move the object, working together. Ask them if they think they would have managed it if they had been by themselves.
- Then, invite people to discuss in smaller groups what issues cause worry to people locally and what issues would be difficult for an individual or one church to impact, but could be changed if people/churches worked together. Consider making a plan for how you could connect with other people/churches locally to do something to address this challenge.

A prayer for all ages

Dear God,
Like the birds, **you know us.**
Like the flowers, **you provide for us.**
Like the sheep, **you gather us to you.**
Thank you for your loving care.
Help us to be open to being gathered as your flock with those around us.
Amen.

Music

Be still my soul the Lord is on your side, Borthwick and Schlegel
Be Thou my Vision O Lord of my heart
Bless the Lord O my soul (10,000 Reasons), Matt Redman
Christ come have mercy on us (Unity Hymn), Kanene and Mike Donehey
Come set Your rule and reign (Build Your Kingdom Here), Rend Collective
He'll leave the 99 sheep to go find the lost (Hey, Hey, Hey), Lifetree Kids
The Lord's my Shepherd, Stuart Townend
You asked me to let go (Control), For King & Country
You call me out upon the waters (Oceans), Hillsong

Go with God

Invite everyone to come back and take a token from the **Gather** activity. Then ask them to exchange that token with another member of the congregation – to symbolise how we help carry one another's burdens collectively, not just alone. If appropriate, spend some time praying together.

A sending out prayer

Based on 'Saint Patrick's Breastplate'

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.
Amen.

Go with God



Putting your faith into action in the days ahead.

Invite everyone to take one of the cotton wool 'sheep' home and place it somewhere to remind them that God does not want them to be afraid. How might they offer the encouragement not to worry to someone else this week?

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Produced by Roots for Churches Ltd, 2027
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