

JESUS' MANIFESTO



Discussion Questions

Mar 22: Don't Worry, Don't Judge

1. Take some time to share how you experienced the practices from last week. How did they impact your daily life? Did you notice any changes over the course of the week? How might this practice help you on a regular basis in the future?
2. What stood out to you from the message this past Sunday? Was there anything that seemed timely or relevant to you? Was there anything which made you uncomfortable, or with which you disagreed?
3. Read Matthew 6:25-34. Is Jesus assuming anxiety to be a normal part of being human or something to avoid? Why do you think Jesus uses the examples of birds and flowers when talking about how much God cares for us? What does this reveal about God? How might this help us worry less?
4. Read Mark 14:32-36 and Mark 15:33-34. In these passages, what differences and similarities do you see in Jesus' responses to anxious stimuli? How do you relate to Jesus in each story and how do you feel challenged?
5. When Jesus says "you of little faith" in Matthew 6:30, the original language could be interpreted that he compassionately understands our struggles with anxiety rather than condemning us. How might this reality empower us to "seek first the kingdom of God" (Matthew 6:33) and center our lives on what really matters?
6. Read Matthew 7:1-5. Discuss what the metaphor of "the speck" might represent? What might "the log" represent. What are the conditions where Jesus suggests we should not try to remove "specks"? What are the conditions where it might be compassionate to help remove "specks"?
7. Take a moment to practice this week's prayer together (see below) and then share your experience of it with each other.

Prayer practice for this week: The Welcoming Prayer

The Welcoming Prayer is a prayer practice that helps us let go of unhealthy responses to certain emotions we are experiencing, while helping us to embrace more of God's love.

Step 1: Awareness

Sit quietly and reflect on the situation for a moment. Notice how you are feeling. Be aware of your emotional state in this moment. Rather than repressing any uncomfortable emotion, go toward it, and let it sink in. Stay with this step of noticing and sinking in until you really experience a connection to the emotion. You may feel it in your body, and it can help to place your hand there as a way of connecting with the emotion more deeply.

Step 2: Welcome

Welcome the emotion as a friend that is going to help you discover something about yourself, rather than as an enemy to be defeated. Don't judge yourself but simply accept how you are feeling right now. Say, "Welcome anxiety, anger etc." Repeat it and sit with the feeling until you experience a genuine sense of owning and accepting it in this moment.

Step 3: Connect

Then allow yourself to honestly discern where the emotion is coming from. Usually this is from a thwarted desire for one or more normal and basic human needs:

- Safety and security
- Esteem and affection
- Power and control

Step 4: Let Go

When you have allowed yourself to accept the negative emotion, and identified its source, let it go by saying, "God, I give You my anxiety, anger etc." Consciously let go of:

- Your demand for safety and security in this situation.
- Your demand for esteem and affection in this situation.
- Your demand for power and control in this situation.

Then rest for a while in God's loving, affirming and totally accepting presence.

Alternative Practice: Shaping and Releasing

Before trying something different, take a few minutes to engage The Welcoming Prayer as described above, even if it has felt difficult or unhelpful in the past. Sit in stillness and silence and gently notice what arises. Afterwards, reflect briefly: what made this practice challenging for you?

Then try a more embodied approach. Using Model Magic, clay, play-dough, or even dirt outside, shape a form that represents how you are feeling right now. Let your emotions move through your hands without overthinking. There is no right or wrong way to do this.

When you are finished, set your creation down and observe it. Look at it from different angles. Notice what it holds or expresses. Resist the urge to judge it. Simply accept that it reflects this moment honestly.

After sitting with it for a few moments, gently reshape or release it, even squashing it completely. Let this be a physical act of letting go, offering these emotions to God, and resting again in God's loving and accepting presence.