

(Sing). *Don't worry about a thing, cause every little thing gonna be alright. Saying don't worry about a thing, cause every little thing gonna be alright. Rise up this morning, smiled with the rising sun. Three little birds pitch by my doorstep. Singing sweet songs of melodies pure and true. Saying, "This is my message to you."*

These words of comfort from the great Bob Marley's song, "*Three Little Birds*" have informed and inspired generations worldwide. He wrote the song while watching birds sing outside his window in Jamaica. These birds, with their joyful, carefree presence, reminded him of a deeper spiritual truth: that there is a divine rhythm to life, a peace that can be found when we trust in the Creator, and they echo deeply with the words St. Paul spoke to the Philippians in our 2nd lesson today:

"Rejoice in the Lord! Rejoice!", he says. "The Lord is near. Don't worry about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and your petition, and with thanks, present your requests to God."

Paul's words invite us not to rejoice just when life is perfect, working well, or falling into place. Rather, it is an invitation to rejoice *always*, especially when things feel shaky, when we feel uncertain or anxious. But how are we to do this in a world full of chaos and noise?

We all long for the peace Paul is talking about: profound and lasting. Yet try as we might, accessing it can be a challenge. How do we *not* worry about the things that weigh us down? And how do we let go of those worries, so that God might enter in?

Jesus offers us an answer in Matthew 11:28-30 when he says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

Speaking directly into our weariness and sorrow, Jesus promises us a gentler way: one that is lighter, easier, and that promises rest and renewal. We need only put our trust in God's care.

It's a simple yet profound invitation that calls us to release our fears and to trust that in God's hands, we will know joy. To trust that indeed, *every little thing is gonna be alright!*

In Marley's words,, like Paul's, we find awe and wonder for God, and God's creation, and the encouragement to let go of our anxiety, to trust in the goodness of each day.

Today, we also remember and celebrate the life and legacy of St. Francis, who over six centuries before Marley, expressed a strong faith and a deep affinity for all of God's creatures, especially birds. He sought to live in harmony with creation and saw all creatures as brothers and sisters. He even preached and sang to them of God's love. But Francis, the Patron Saint of animals didn't just love and talk to God's creatures, he *listened* to them. Francis believed that relationship with animals and nature were spiritual, God-given, and could teach us a lot.

Today, we celebrate the animals we love and who bring so much love into our lives. As we bless them, we're not just performing a ritual, but are celebrating a sacred bond—one that reminds us of the goodness of creation, of God's love for every living being, and of the joy and peace that arises out of our encounters with the sacred, the holy.

I read of a woman, and her rescue dog, Max. Despite a difficult past, Max greeted her, and each day, with pure joy. Every morning with his tail wagging, he was game for whatever came his way, unburdened by yesterday's troubles or tomorrow's uncertainties. Although the woman felt certain that she had saved Max, it was his simple and joyful presence that transformed her life.

Like many pets, Max loved her unconditionally, not based on her achievements, her status, or her failures. Max remained loyal through thick and thin. And he demanded that she join him in living fully in the present moment.

This is the gift of God's creation and God's creatures. They demand our attention, call us to be present and invite us to bask in the moment. Our worries, preoccupations and regrets disappear, and we are left only to engage the now. And that, my friends, is a gift. Because as St. Paul has told us, this is when we come to experience and know God's peace.

Sermon: Every little thing is gonna be alright.
The Rev. Laurel Coote 10/6/24
The Feast of St. Francis and the Blessing of the Animals

Philippians 4:4-9
Matthew 11:27-30

As Jesus beckons us to lay down our burdens and to put our trust in him, he likewise calls us to live like this: to let go of anxiety, to be gentle with ourselves and others, and to find rest and peace in God's care, to trust that *every little thing is gonna be alright*.

Jesus invites us to depend upon God, just as our pets depend upon us. He asks us to trust in God's care and love for us, to surrender our worries and to live for THIS moment, because worrying won't add a moment to our lives, and only draws us away from that which we most long to be near. God is here, so don't worry about anything. Bask in the beauty of God's love, and all of God's creation.

Like Francis, let us find in God's creatures the inspiration to live simply, free of anxiety and with trust in God's care for us. Let us practice loving without condition, being seekers of joy, and being bearers of God's hope, love and peace.

So today, as we strive to model the life and service of St. Francis, and as we bless our beloved animals, let us be thankful for their presence in our lives, and for their examples of what it means to be loving, faithful, accepting, comforting, forgiving, and loyal. May we model their ability to live in the moment. And may we carry in our hearts, and sing with joy the words of Bob Marley, which echo those of St. Paul, and Jesus:

"Don't worry about a thing, 'cause every little thing is gonna be alright."

Amen.
