

The Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity – Pr. Faugstad sermon
St. Matthew 6:24-34: “The Keeper of Today and Tomorrow Cares for You.”
September 11/12, 2021 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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Almighty God, our heavenly Father, You feed the birds and clothe the flowers, and care for us as a father for his children: We beseech You of Your tender goodness to save us from distrust and vain self-concern; that with unwavering faith we may cast our every care on You, and live in daily obedience to Your will; through Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (*Parish Prayers*, ed. Frank Colquhoun, p. 120)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

[Jesus said:] “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and [mammon]. / “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? / “Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. / “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” (ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who invites you to bring your concerns to the heavenly Father in prayer (Phi. 4:6) and to “[cast] all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you” (1Pe. 5:7), dear fellow redeemed:

What’s better: getting a raise and a promotion at work or getting your sins forgiven at church? Having expendable income to buy whatever you please, or having immeasurable grace to cover all your sins? Seeing a healthy return on your investments which promises a secure financial future, or seeing the Word and Sacraments continue to be administered at your church which promises the continued outpouring of God’s rich blessings?

We know the right answers to these questions, but the way we prioritize and live our life is not always consistent with them. We struggle with our devotion to the things of this world. We

don't want to give up the well-made plans we have made for this life. We imagine we can keep both the world and the Word close. But Jesus draws a line in the sand: *"You cannot serve God and [mammon] – God and money/property/possessions."*

Who would ever *"serve"* these earthly things? The word means to be a slave to something. We are enslaved to mammon when the opportunities, treasures, and pleasures of the world mean more to us than the promises and gifts of God. We are enslaved to mammon when losing earthly things is our greatest concern and gaining earthly things causes our greatest joy. But mammon cannot forgive sins. It cannot deliver us from the devil. And it cannot save us from death.

Those who set their hearts on mammon – on these temporary things – are always anxious. They have put their trust in something that can slip through their fingers or be wrenched from their hands. But what else is there? Mammon is the only thing we can hope to control. That is the whole problem. We try to have control over things that are out of our control. We try to control what belongs to God.

God gives us these earthly things. They are meant for our use and enjoyment. They are not meant to take God's place. Mammon does not love you; God loves you. Mammon does not take care of you; God does. Mammon makes no promises about your today or your tomorrow. God promises to take care of you and provide for all your needs since you are His own child.

Your status as God's beloved child is the reason Jesus says, *"do not be anxious about your life."* Now if you tell someone you are worried about something in the present or in the future, you don't want to hear them say, *"Oh, that's nothing to worry about. Just stop worrying about that."* Someone telling you to *"stop your worrying"* does not make your worry go away. But Jesus says more than that here. He tells us why we have no reason to be worried.

He says we don't have to worry about what we will eat or drink, because our heavenly Father provides for the birds, and we are more valuable than they are. He says we don't have to worry about clothing, because if the Lord arrays the flowers in beautiful clothing, He will most certainly clothe us. He says that our heavenly Father knows exactly what we need, so there is no need to be anxious about tomorrow.

But a lot of bad things could happen tomorrow. We could become seriously ill or injured. Our home and all our possessions could be destroyed. Enemies could attack us and cause terrible damage. That's what happened twenty years ago this weekend. Terrorists took control of planes and flew them into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and would have flown another into the White House or the Capitol building. Many lives were lost. Our nation was drawn into war. Something like this could happen again today or tomorrow. Terrible things may be in store for us. How could we not be anxious?

A couple years before the attacks of 9/11, there were people who stockpiled goods and moved into bunkers because they thought the dawning of the year 2000 would usher in an apocalypse. We saw similar behaviors at the start of the 2020 pandemic when people stockpiled supplies and braced for the worst. We still feel anxiety about COVID-19 and its new variants. Our future and the future of our loved ones is uncertain. We don't know what could happen tomorrow.

And yet Jesus says, *“do not be anxious about tomorrow.”* It sounds too simplistic. It sounds like unfounded optimism. Things are bad today. Why should we be hopeful about tomorrow? Jesus does not tell us to be hopeful because nothing bad will happen to us in the future. He is not a prosperity preacher. He doesn't tell us that we're going to be really happy with all the success that is about to come our way. He doesn't say that our worst days are behind us and our best days are ahead.

He says, *“do not be anxious about tomorrow,”* because He is the God of tomorrow. We don't know what tomorrow will bring, but He does. It is better that we don't know. If we knew what tomorrow would bring—both the good and the bad—our joys would be muted and our sorrows would be magnified. In His wisdom and mercy, God has chosen to keep us blind about the future. He does this so that we put all our hope, all our trust, and all our confidence in Him and not in our own preparations or efforts.

Perhaps you've played the game where someone blindfolds you, and you have to follow their verbal instructions to avoid bumping into things or going where you don't want to be. I saw a variation of this game in which a narrow, winding pathway was edged by mousetraps ready to spring on every side and at every turn. There could be great perils and troubles in our future, but we are not called to worry about those things. We are called to listen to the voice of our merciful Lord and trust His promises.

But trust demands that we give up control or at least the sense of control. Trust means that we place our needs for today and tomorrow into the hands of another. It is hard for us to trust the Lord in this way. We remember the times that we trusted Him, and things did not seem to go well for us. We trusted Him to help us, but we failed. We trusted Him to fix our problems, but they only got worse. We have all asked this question before in our minds if not out loud, *“Is God trustworthy—is He worthy of my trust?”*

The answer to that question is found in the womb of a poor woman, on a Roman cross, and in an empty tomb. We don't judge God's trustworthiness by how well He has delivered what we want. We judge His trustworthiness by how well He has delivered what He promises and what we need. God made a promise after Adam and Eve sinned that He would send a Savior to crush Satan's head and deliver mankind from sin and death. God kept that promise when thousands of years later, He sent His eternal Son to be born of the virgin Mary.

Jesus was born under the Law, so that He might keep it in every way where we have failed and sinned against God, and fulfill it perfectly for you and me. And then He went to the cross carrying all our sins, so that His innocent suffering and death would make atonement for all of our wrongs. Jesus knew that suffering was in His future even as He said, *“do not be anxious about tomorrow.”* He was not blind to the hellish punishment He would have to endure, but He still went forward. He faced that tomorrow, the tomorrow of His death. His love for His Father kept Him from turning back. His love for you pushed Him toward all those horrors and pains.

But after His death, there was a tomorrow of rest. And then there was a tomorrow of victory over death. Jesus was in perfect control of each tomorrow, just as He is in control of all your tomorrows. No one took His life; He laid it down of His own accord. In John 10 He said, *“I have*

authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again" (v. 18). And that's what He did to win salvation for you and for me. He died for our sins and rose again to secure eternal victory over our death.

You do not have power over your sin and death, but He does. You do not have control over your today and tomorrow, but He does. And He is not anxious about tomorrow. You will not face anything tomorrow that He can't handle. He has already defeated sin, death, and the devil for you! He is not going to forget about you. He is not going to leave you to suffer alone. He suffered for you, and He now joins you in your suffering to strengthen you. He will get you through whatever sickness, pain, or trouble that may come your way.

He is the solution for your anxiety and worry. When you enter His house and kneel or stand before Him at the altar rail, you can bring all your troubles, all your pains, all your uncertainties and hand them over to Him. And in return, He will give you peace—the peace of forgiveness, the peace of reconciliation with God, the peace of knowing that your future is secure in Him even when your life on this earth comes to an end.

You do not need to know what is going to happen later today or tomorrow. What you need to know is that your merciful and gracious Lord is **The Keeper of Today and Tomorrow, and He Cares for You**. As the psalmist says: *"The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade on your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore"* (Psa. 121:5-8).

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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