

The Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity – Pr. Faugstad sermon
St. Matthew 6:24-34: “Worldly Cares Vs. God’s Care”
September 17, 2023 | 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, whose promise to provide for us is far more powerful than our worries and troubles, dear fellow redeemed:

He says it *five* times!

1. “Do not be **anxious** about your life.”
2. “Which of you by being **anxious** can add a single hour to his span of life?”
3. “Why are you **anxious** about clothing?”
4. “Do not be **anxious**, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’”
5. “Do not be **anxious** about tomorrow.”

Jesus thinks we have an anxiousness problem, a worry problem, and Jesus is never wrong. He also identifies another problem: our little faith. Both of those go together – worry and a lack of faith. We worry because we do not believe God will do what He says, or at least we have doubts that He will provide for us in just the way and at just the time that we need it.

But what is it that causes our worry? What is our worry based on? Our worry is not based on anything we find in God's Word. We don't read about an arbitrary or a fickle God who sometimes chooses to bless His children and sometimes chooses to harm them. At times He does chasten and discipline us, because He wants to lead us to repentance and a stronger faith. But this is done out of love. He is always faithful. He does not change. So worry is not based on uncertainty about God's will and work which are clearly revealed to us in His Word.

Worry is based on our own experience and the evidence we see around us in the world. We can think of times when we had more expenses than income, more responsibilities than we had the ability to meet. Maybe we were worried about paying our bills, and then more bills came. We didn't know where the money would come from to cover even the essentials like food and utilities. Or one of our family members was sick, and we didn't know if we could afford the medicine needed for healing.

We also look around us and see many people who go hungry, who can't afford clothing, who have no place to go home to. If God feeds the birds and clothes the lilies, why doesn't He feed and clothe all people in need? And if doesn't do this for the people who really need it, how can we be sure He will do this for us? So we worry. We give more weight to our experiences and doubts than to God's promises.

When we allow worry to come in, we are taking matters that God wants to handle and holding those matters in our own hands. We keep the burden on ourselves of providing for our needs and fixing our own problems. Or we look for another provider, another god, whose promises seem more reliable.

This is how many people view the government. They trust the government to take care of all their needs. But as necessary as government is—and God has certainly ordained it for good order and for our protection—yet government is made up of sinners, who are often ready to take as much or more than they promise to give.

Our worries really come down to 1) having enough and 2) keeping what we have. A person just out of high school or a married couple with little children might especially worry about having enough. They do without new clothes, new cars, and a nice house. Retirement is a long way off – there's lots of work to do! But older individuals whose work has been blessed and who are able to afford the finer things, now worry about having enough to retire on and having the good health and energy to enjoy it.

When we worry about the future like this, we behave like *"the Gentiles."* Jesus says, *"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."* Now many of us are Gentiles in the sense of not having Jewish background. But Jesus is referring to the

unbelieving Gentiles, the ones who did not have the Scriptures. That isn't us, but we act like the unbelievers when we worry about having what we need.

Instead of worry, Jesus teaches us to do this: *"seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."* He says that when we put our faith in God and His Word—little though our faith may be—, all the things we need for this earthly life will be provided to us. That's quite a promise! It's a promise that we have difficulty accepting.

We think that if we are going to prosper in this life, we have to make it happen. We have to outwork our co-workers, we have to come up with new solutions to get ourselves noticed by the "higher-ups." We have to be in the right place at the right time. Then we will have a shot at our dreams. Then we can have a chance at the life we always wanted.

This is not a criticism of hard work. God wants every one of us to do our work to the best of our ability, whether we are in the classroom, in the workplace, in our homes, or at church. God never endorses laziness. In teaching us not to worry, Jesus is certainly not teaching us to sit back and wait for everything to drop in our lap. The apostle Paul couldn't have said it more clearly than this: *"If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat"* (2Th. 3:10).

The difference is working for selfish gain or working for godly gain. We work for godly gain when we recognize that God is the one who gives each of us our unique abilities and strengths to employ in His service. We trust that He will bless our efforts as He sees fit. He might give more to some of His children and less to others, but all of it is a gift from His gracious hand. So it is not helpful to compare what we have with what others have, since God is the Giver, and *"He is good, for His mercy endures forever"* (Psa. 136:1).

And how do we know this is true beyond any doubt, that God really is so good and merciful? We know this because the Father who created and provides for all things also gave the greatest gift of all—His only-begotten Son to save us. When Jesus says, *"seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,"* He is referring to His own holy work.

God the Father sent Him to do for us what we could not accomplish, no matter how much we worried after it or worked for it. Jesus the Christ was born under the Law, so that He might redeem us, buy us back, by His own holy life. While we are anxious and doubtful about God's care for us, He perfectly entrusted Himself to the Father's will. He did not worry about tomorrow; He focused on God's Word today.

Wherever we have failed in our work through our worry, our selfishness, and our laziness, Jesus fulfilled the holy Law through His faith, His love, and His perfect commitment to the work of saving us sinners. *"His righteousness"* is the righteousness we must seek if we will stand before God in heaven. And this is the righteousness we already have by faith in Jesus.

Yes, our faith is *"little"* and never as strong as it should be. But even a little faith has salvation in Christ. Our eternal future does not depend on how strong our faith is, but on how strong our Savior and Lord is. And He is strong! He is stronger than hunger and want, stronger than worry and fear, stronger than sin, death, and the devil.

He suffered when He went to the cross, but He was not worried. Just before He took His last breath, He cried out, *"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!"* (Luk. 23:46). Then He was taken off the cross and closed up in the tomb, but He was not worried. Death was no match for Him, and He rose from the dead on the third day to prove it.

It is this Conqueror of sin and death who tells you: *"Do not be anxious; do not worry."* If your needs and concerns are like ten enemies threatening you with pocket knives and pitchforks, God's care is like an entire army right behind you outfitted with the best weapons and equipment. Worldly cares are scattered by the powerful promise of God's care.

He will provide for you. If He needs to say it again and again, even every day, He will: *"Do not be anxious. I have not forgotten about your needs. I know how to turn trials into blessings. I will come and help you. Have no fear!"* In His care for you, God the Father already sent His Son to rescue you from eternal death. That must mean He will not forsake you in your times of need (Rom. 8:32).

And you know this to be true. You know that your cares and worries have never done anything for you. You know that God's care for you has never failed. Even when you were anxious, even when you complained, He kept on loving you. And if He didn't give you everything you wanted at the time, He gave you everything you needed.

God knows your needs even better than you do. He gives you His kingdom and His righteousness for your eternal life, and He gives all that you need for this body and life besides.

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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