

*“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.*

*Matthew 6:25-34*

Here Jesus talks about lilies of the field. Sometimes various translations also say wildflowers. We know what Jesus is talking about. He’s not talking about our roses in the yard. Hanging Chrysanthemums or mums in pots on our front steps. He’s talking about flowers that grow in a totally random fashion in nature. They are not purposefully planted, tended, or paid much attention to. Like the dandelion! Consider the dandelions, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin. They are fought with the harshest of chemicals and suffer disparaging remarks and hatred.

Our anxieties rarely come from concern over food or clothing, unless it is what kind of food or clothing. Do we enjoy it. Is the food healthy for us to eat? How many calories does it have? Do the clothes make us feel good and look good? Personal fulfillment is the name of the game for us in our affluent culture.

And nothing gives us greater personal fulfillment than when other people like us and we receive kudos and likes. When we see celebrities and politicians get bad press because of a mistake they made or they did something unpopular, we are haunted with the prospect of that kind of negativity ever being blasted toward us. We’re never happy with photographs taken of us because we don’t look as good as we would like. Or even if the shot does turn out quite well we just don’t have a good internal image of ourselves and that gets projected onto what we see on the screen or in the photo.

We may know many of our neighbors casually, but they are not part of our personal “village.” We have to go to our other places to find our village. Places like family gatherings, work, clubs, societies, and here in church. Since the age of the traditional village is long past, where everyone knew everyone else and the entire village carried the burdens of each individual member, loneliness is the bane of our age. We are more desperate for approval now than ever before. People are willing to do almost anything so that someone will laugh at what they said. Or will admire or respect us. Look what all takes place on social media these days. The ancients

would recognize this as hubris, but it is hubris so gross, so overfed and coddled as to be beyond their recognition.

Its good for us to repent of our lonely desperation and relax in God's promised presence. The dandelions are an example for you. They don't notice how much they are hated. They know they are loved by God. They know that he delights in their beauty as they reach upward toward heaven and fulfill their destiny. They are unashamed to be dandelions. And they make no attempt to be anything else. I tell you, even Solomon in all his splendor was not dressed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is sprayed with weed killer or dug up and thrown into the trash, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? You are worth far more than dandelions. And dandelions are worth a lot.

The dandelions suffer the consequences of sin, including our warfare against them, even though they are without sin. And they do not fight back. The Lord delights in their beauty and yet, as pious and faithful as they are, He did not take up the stuff of dandelions and redeem them.

But he has taken up your flesh. He has clothed himself not just in your skin but also with your sins. He has declared himself guilty for your crimes. He has gone to the cross and set Barabbas free. He has been forsaken by the Father, endured all the demands and tortures of hell and justice on your behalf, in order to draw you near. He has made himself a sacrifice, an atonement for the life of the world, the innocent given for the guilty, in order to clothe you with his grace.

So do not ask, "What shall we eat?" for the Lord has said, "Take, eat, this is my body." Do not ask, "What shall we drink?" for the Lord has said, "Drink of it, the cup of the New Testament in My blood, all of you." And do not ask, "What shall we wear? Do I look fat? How can I get the world to notice me, to care about me?" for the Lord has covered your nakedness and shame with his holiness, righteousness and glory. You are beautiful to him, worth all he had, worth the life of his Son.

If you are lonely, if you think yourself unattractive, boring, or dumb, then read the *Song of Songs* in the bible. It is a love poem from God to you. Hear there the Lord's borderline erotic attraction for you. His thumping desire, his eager love. For you are worth more than the birds of the air, the lilies of the fields, or even the holy angels. You are worth more than your family or friends or co-workers might ever imagine, even more than you yourself would ever think you are worth.

Now that is something to be thankful for! Amen.

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Note: This sermon is adapted from *God with Us*, by the Rev' d David Petersen, 2014, Emmanuel Press.