

8-7-22 Sermon August 7, 2022 9th Sunday after Pentecost Luke 12:22-34

The American Psychological Association says that in 2020 “rampant anxiety” became a national mental health emergency. With election hub-bub, Afghanistan, the war in Ukraine, and inflation, I don’t think it has gotten any better.

Well then good thing that Jesus addresses anxiety in today’s Gospel!

And he said to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life.”

There are many fears and phobias that can make us anxious: Spiders; Snakes; Terrorist threats; Politicians; Public speaking; Covid-19/ other sickness; flying; death of a loved one; elevators; job security; running out of money; our own death.

Today Jesus especially addresses anxiety that comes from worrying about material needs. The One who created all things and keeps the universe together and running can easily make sure we have everything we need, and he promises the same to us. He tells us not to worry about the things we need for daily life. This is his will for us – to not worry about such things.

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on.”

Jesus gives us some illustrations to help make his point.

Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!

Here Jesus would have us respond that we are much more valuable to God than the birds. Birds are birds, but we have been created in his own image. Jesus continues;

Consider the lilies, 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, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you ...

How much more will God clothe us over and against the flowers? Very much more. And if God can care for the countless plants of the earth which overwhelmingly outnumber us, it is no problem for God to properly care for us.

So why all the worry? Jesus cuts us to the quick with what he says at the end of this section.

But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!

Ouch! Jesus says the reason for our worry is our lack of faith. It seems most all of our shortcomings flow from the same stream – lack of faith. How often Jesus points out the disciples’ lack of faith. “Ye of little faith” is a popular phrase we still use today when people express doubt about something someone says. How often we wonder and doubt about Jesus’ promise to provide. Perhaps the real fear behind our lack of faith is the fear of suffering. If we don’t have enough money then we will suffer. If we go bankrupt, we will suffer. If the market crashes, we will suffer. If interest rates are low, it’s hard to make any money. If they go up, we are stuck in lower yielding investments. Our bond funds lose principal, and it costs more to get a loan. And in a worst-case scenario, if inflation keeps up, we might not be able to make the rent and then we’d have to cut out the caviar.

But in all seriousness, Jesus does speak strong words to us. He says “Do not be anxious.” “Do not fear.” “Do not worry.” “Do not seek after the things God has already promised to you.” The picture he paints is pretty clear. How good we are at taking black paint and smearing it all over Jesus’ words.

It is not fitting that we who belong to the eternal God should worry about material needs. But we do. Remember what Jesus said to his friend Martha about the one thing needful? Jesus told Martha to change her attitude about what is really important. He tells us to change ours, too.

Jesus says that perfect love drives out fear. Our love is always imperfect. But his is not. His is a perfect love. While we were busy seeking all the things he tells us not to worry about, Jesus sought us out. Thank God he found us! Though everything in creation belongs to him, he came to this earth with nothing. He died in the same way. The only thing Jesus wore on the cross was the thorns they pushed into his head. His only known possession was the garment the soldiers cast lots to win. He gave up his claim on everything here below so that we could inherit his whole kingdom.

Not only does he promise to provide everything we need for the body, he has already begun to provide for our souls. He clothes us with his own garment of holiness, he serves us the holy food from his table in the Lords Supper, and he has ascended into heaven to prepare a place for us there.

Now Jesus tells us to trade our fear for faith, our worry for confidence, and our anxiety for his eternal joy. Jesus tells us to stop getting all wrapped up in the things of this world, and instead

“... seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.”

This means we desire God’s riches in Christ more than we desire material riches. We understand about material riches. What are God’s riches in Christ? God’s riches in Christ are his Word of truth, his cleansing word of forgiveness, our adoption in baptism, and fellowship with God, saints, and angels at the marriage feast of the Lamb.

Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.

Instead of worrying how to get things, we reverse course and live generously toward others. God will continue to give us everything we need to the point there is some left over. That isn’t for us to hoard. It is for us to bless someone else with! A sign of our faith is that we trust God enough to share some of what we have, knowing that God will continue to provide.

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Where is our treasure? Is it our house, convertible, collection, or brokerage statements? We can't take any of that with us. The one who dies with the most toys doesn't win. In Jesus our victory is already won. Our treasure is Jesus and his riches: his love; his salvation; his friendship; his promises; his life; and the ways of his kingdom. Amen.

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