

February 27, 2011
Epiphany 8

"Jesus Tells Us Not to Worry"

MATTHEW 6:24-34

No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

²⁵ "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

²⁸ "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Jesus did not speak these words about worrying to a large crowd of people. He spoke them instead to a handful of his beloved disciples who were gathered around him on a mountain away from the large crowds that were following him. Why would these disciples need Jesus to tell them not to worry? Didn't they have Jesus right there with them? Had they not seen great miracles Jesus such as feeding 5,000 people with only five barley loaves and two small fish?

If these disciples who walked with Jesus had a problem with worry, what about you and what about me? Think of all the times we have let our worries get the best of us. In the midst of our worries and fears and anxieties we lose touch with the reality that our heavenly Father is taking care of us. We lose sight with how privileged we are to have Jesus taking care of us as our King of kings and Lord of lords.

I look out in the backyard and see the birds scratching away at the compost that surrounds our plants. They don't seem to have a care in the world as they eagerly uncover the food the heavenly Father has provided for them. The birds that fly south to escape the cold fly from bush to bush eating the seeds our heavenly Father placed their for them. Jesus tells us not to worry because we are more important than the birds of the air. We are so privileged to be people living in God's kingdom under his care and under his personal intense love for us.

Look at the birds of the air

Before he points to the birds of the air, Jesus talks to us about this struggle we face with trying to serve two masters. "No one can serve two masters. 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 both God and Money." In a sermon on these words Martin Luther talks about having chickens in your yard and feeding them. The chickens decide to lay all their eggs in the neighbor's yard. They were not loyal to the people who fed them and took care of them.

That can happen with chickens and it can also happen with people. The Lord blesses us so richly and abundantly in so many ways, and then we devote ourselves to money and what it can buy for us more than the Lord. You are walking across the parking lot and notice a piece of paper blowing in the wind. You pick it up. It is a lottery ticket that has been lost. You have never bought a lottery ticket in your life. The next day you check the paper for the winning numbers and look at your ticket. Suddenly your heart beats. You become breathless. You are a winner of a lottery worth millions. I know that I would have a terrible time with that money because even if I gave it all away immediately, I would think too much about it. Paul warned a young pastor Timothy, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." Just think about how much we worry about money in one lifetime here on this earth, whether we have much or little.

Jesus told his disciples not to worry about money and other things. "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body what you will wear. Is life not more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air, they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not more valuable than they?" This word for worry is used in a good way in 1 Corinthians where it describes Christians being concerned for other Christians. It is OK for a mother to be concerned and worried about her child that has a high fever. There is the bad kind of worry that is sinful worry. It is a worry where we lose sight of how much our heavenly Father cares about us, and provides for us, and hears our prayers. We may even forget the promises of God. There are so many beautiful promises in this book we love, the Holy Bible.

Did you hear about the parrot in London that flew out of the house and managed to survive the cold and rainy nights? The man of the house forgot that Jack was on his shoulder when he opened the door to get the morning paper. Jack, sixteen years old, flew away. They put flyers everywhere. A couple of months later they received a call from the zoo about fifteen miles away. Jack was with the chickens in the zoo, sleeping in their warm coop, eating their food, and even mimicking the clucking sounds of the chickens. Instead of dying of hunger and cold, Jack was enjoying the comforts of the chicken coop.

Jesus tells us to look at the birds of the air and the peace and comfort they find with our heavenly Father. The Greek word for the "Look" is intensified with a prefix. We might say, "Take a good look" at the birds. They sing as if they don't have a care in the world because our heavenly Father is taking care of them. Jesus asks us this morning: "Are you not much more valuable than they?" In a great sermon on these words Martin Luther says in a teasing way that we should listen to the birds because they are preaching a sermon to us. He imagines the bird speaking thus: "I sing and frolic and yet I do not know of a

single grain that I am to eat. My bread is not baked yet, and my grain is not planted yet. But I have a rich Master who takes care of me while I am singing or sleeping. He can give me more than all my worries and he worries of all people could ever accomplish.”

Next, Jesus directs our attention to the lilies of the field. “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not clothe you, O you of little faith.” This wonderful rain will help the wild flowers grow in the fields and in the mountains. Some of the most beautiful flowers are on the small grasses that grow on the hills. Bend down, look at the flowers closely, and capture them with your camera. These flowers are so short lived and yet the Lord clothes them with such beauty. Wear green pants with a purple shirt and people will laugh at you. The Lord can put purple and green together in a flower and astound us with its beauty. Most of us sitting here this morning do not have a problem with too few clothes in our clothes. Our problem comes with knowing what to get rid of so we can make room for more. How many shirts or blouses do you have?

The pagans run after things as if they will not be any food or clothes in the future. Jesus says that our heavenly Father knows what we need. In the Lord’s Prayer we pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.” How would you rate the Lord on well he has taken care of you in the past? Would you give him a “C” or a “B” or an “A?” No, I think we would all give the Lord our God an “A+” for the way he has cared for us. Why shouldn’t we expect more in the future? This is our heavenly Father. This is our God who gave his Son to rescue us from the sin that condemns, including our sin of worry. This is the God who has brought us to believe in Jesus and made us his own dear children. He is totally committed to caring for all our needs. “O give thanks unto the Lord for he is good, for his mercy endures forever.” These words are not just a pious platitude. This is concrete reality for every day living. We live without worry about what the future will bring.

Look at the kingdom that is yours

Jesus offers us even more help with this problem. He reminds that we are part of the kingdom of God. “But seek first the kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” Whenever we worry, we start searching for something that will help us overcome our worries. We look for the money to pay the bills. We look for friends or family who can provide us with the support we need. We look for the doctor who can help us recover from pain and sickness.

Jesus tells us to seek God’s kingdom first. He is waiting for you. He is your King. Let him take you in his arms and show you the treasures he has for you. He offers you the greatest treasure in the world which is his love for you. He does not offer you this unflinching love and loyalty because you have earned it. We have deserved nothing but his rejection and wrath for constantly dipping into filth of sin and making it a part of our lives. Jesus earned this love for us. His payment of sin was so thorough and so complete that God welcomes you into his kingdom. Colossians 1 says, “For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Our God rescues us and makes us part of the

kingdom of the Son he loves. The Father loves his Son Jesus. He loves the kingdom he has established and he loves the people who are brought into his kingdom.

Some you can recall a song from the 1950's by Perry Como that went something like this. "If you are worried and you can't sleep, Just count your blessings instead of sheep. And you'll fall asleep counting your blessings." And then there is the hymn, "Count your blessings, Count them one by one..." I read recently that there are over 100 billion stars in our Milky Way Galaxy and over 100 billion Galaxies in the universe. The vastness of the universe is mind boggling. There is something even more vast than the size of the universe, it is the size of your heavenly Father's love for you. In Psalm 139 David says, "How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them. Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand." All these thoughts our Heavenly Father as for us because we are privileged to be part of his kingdom. Before we even begin to worry, let's think about what it means to be part of God's kingdom and live under his everlasting love.

Let's end this sermon this morning by looking at Jesus' final words about worry. "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." The psalmist David also said, "My times are in your hands, O Lord." You have heard this often but it is worth repeating. "You don't know what the future holds, but you do know who holds the future." The Savior holds your future. He joyfully tells you and me "Do not worry!" Amen.