

The 8th Sunday after the Epiphany

Text: Matthew 6:24-34 (NIV)

²⁴“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. 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 important than food, and the body more important than clothes? ²⁶Look 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? ²⁷Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? ²⁸“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰If 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, O you of little faith? ³¹So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³²For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Theme: Calming Anxious Hearts

Our Lord tells us not to worry in these verses. When I shared that with one of our shut-in members in my devotion this past week, we agreed that it’s easy for Him to say. We’ll often tell people, “Don’t worry,” but that’s easier said than done. There are many things that we could worry about in life, but in our text today our Lord calms our anxious hearts.

I. There are many things that raise our anxiety level.

They often have to do with our health and life Jesus tells us not to worry about our lives, but that seems easier said than done. A couple of weeks ago, I had a spot of melanoma removed from my arm. I’m thankful that the prognosis is good that the cancer didn’t spread beyond that spot. But I have a confession to make. When the doctor used the “c” word, my jaw dropped. When he told me that it was the most serious form of skin cancer, I was even more worried. When I went to the internet and read an article about melanoma, I had to stop after just a few sentences. That night I didn’t sleep at all. Many of you know exactly what I am talking about when the doctor gave you a diagnosis with the “c” word or another serious condition. I have also ministered to many people right after they have received a troubling diagnosis. Our anxiety level takes a sudden spike.

Our Lord also mentions financial matters. He says, “*Do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we wear?’*” Again we might say that it’s easier said than done. When the bills are more than what’s in the checkbook, our level of stress increases. Eventually, the telephone starts to ring, and when we see the bill collector on the call ID, we wonder whether we should answer. It is very stressful when we can’t seem to make ends meet. We can’t afford the necessities in life, let alone even a small luxury.

II. Jesus calms those fears.

He encourages us to take our eyes off of the things of this world. He tells us to look at the birds and consider how God provides for them or to look at the flowers and consider how beautiful they are. Aren't we much more valuable than they? The pagans are worried about the things of this earth. They have their hearts and minds set on them. The best that they can hope for are the things of this world. They'll say, "When you have your health, you have everything." They worry and fret about their finances. They are obsessed with the investments and their retirement accounts. All that they have are the things and joys of this world. When those things begin to fade away, their lives also begin to wither away. There is fear and anxiety about what will come next.

As Christians our eyes are on God. He knows that we need all of these things. God has given us our life. He takes care of us just as He cares for all the creatures and living things of this world. We are more valuable to Him than any of them. When our eyes focus on God and His goodness rather than our worries, we realize that God is good and His mercy endures forever. We remember the blessings that He has given to us, and the ways that He has helped us through tough times in the past. We know that He will never leave us and forsake us. By God's grace that level of stress begins to lower when we focus on God rather than our worries.

Our eyes are especially on His spiritual blessings. Jesus tells us to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness first. God loved us so much that He gave us His only Son. He bled and died on the cross to take away our sin. He rose victoriously from the dead as our Savior. In Holy Baptism He has washed away our sin and clothed us with His righteousness.

He opens His kingdom to us. In the Large Catechism Martin Luther mentions verse 33 in his explanation to the 2nd petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Thy Kingdom Come." He writes, "**You see that we are praying here not for a crust of bread or for a temporal, perishable blessing, but for an eternal, priceless treasure and everything that God himself possesses. It would be far too great for any human heart to dare to desire if God himself had not commanded us to ask for it. But because he is God, he claims the honor of giving far more abundantly and liberally than anyone can comprehend — like an eternal, inexhaustible fountain which, the more it gushes forth and overflows, the more it continues to give. He desires of us nothing more ardently than that we ask many and great things of him;**"¹ God promises us His kingdom through faith in Jesus Christ. We shall live and reign with Him forever. The sufferings that we have in this life can't even begin to compare with the glory that God will reveal in us. If God has given us such great and precious gifts, we can be sure that He will give us everything that we need in this world.

Our hearts also go to our Heavenly Father in prayer Jesus says, "*Your Heavenly Father knows that you need them.*" Our Lord invites us to begin our prayers, "Our Father, who art in heaven." We can go to God boldly and confidently as children to go their parents when they are in need. In Paul Gerhardt's hymn, "If God Himself Be for Me," he writes, "**This I believe, yea rather, of this I make my boast, that God is my dear Father, the friend who loves me most.**"^b We come before God as our heavenly Father in prayer, confident of His love for us. We bring our worries and

¹Tappert, Theodore G.: *The Book of Concord : The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Philadelphia : Fortress Press, 2000, c1959, S. 427

anxieties to Him. It's important that we also remember to pray for each other. I can't tell you how important it was for me when Christian friends told me that they were going to pray for me and when some prayed for me on the spot. It is a wonderful comfort when we bring our needs before God in prayer, and when we know that our brothers and sisters in Christ are praying for us also.

III. Faith in our Lord and His mercy calms our hearts, no matter what happens.

It was a big relief to me last week when the doctor told me that everything would be okay. It calms our fears when we things work out. We give God thanks and praise when we get better or we are able to make it through those tough financial times.

But God also has a way of bringing peace to our hearts when the need persists or our health deteriorates. When I was a very young pastor, one of my members in Harrow asked if I could visit her son who was just diagnosed with cancer. That man had fear like I had never seen before. In our first visit, he was angry at God, the world, and even me. For the next 6 months, I would often visit with him. I noticed a change. Not only did his health deteriorate, but he learned to give his fears and worries to our Lord. He found strength in Christ. He even began to look forward to his eternal life with his Lord. When our Lord called him, six months later, that man left this life in peace in the sure confidence that God loved him and would soon take him to His glory. That is the peace that passes all understanding, which comes from seeking God's kingdom and His righteousness.

"Don't worry." It sounds much easier said than done, but when we look to God and His righteousness instead of our troubles and worries, when we bring those concerns to our Heavenly Father in prayer, a miracle begins to take place. Our anxiety goes down. Our hearts begin to find peace in our Lord. He assures us that we are precious to Him and that when we seek Him and His kingdom, there is nothing to fear. In His mercy, He will give all that we need.

May God fill each of our hearts with that peace.

Amen.

***Pastor Don Hougard
Benediction Lutheran Church
Milwaukee, WI
February 27, 2011***