

August 12, 2007

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

“Anxiety about being Anxious”

Luke 12: 22-40

*And he said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. 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! And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? 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, O you of little faith! And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.*

*"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 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. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

*"Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them. If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants! But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."*

Sermon

*"Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on."* It seems a rather cavalier statement, doesn't it? It almost sounds like what someone with a truckload of food and clothing might say. It rings along the lines of Marie Antoinette's famed quip, "Let them eat cake."

Back at the seminary we had the Call Day Countdown board in the game room. It was filled out at the beginning of the year with numbers counting down to April 25 as zero-day, when all us fourth-year guys would find out to which church we were headed. When Call day was only a few weeks away and a lot of space on the board was empty, I wrote a verse parallel to our Gospel text from Matthew on the board; *"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."*

I was told that one of the learned professors saw it and remarked, “That’s a stupid thing to put up there. It’s Call Day. Of course they’re going to be anxious. It’s dumb to tell them not to be.”

A couple years ago I’m sure you folks saw a bunch of anxious people, many probably right among those gathered here today. I remember spending a couple nights on my vicarage with evacuees from Katrina who were being housed at the local National Guard barracks. Those folks were worried, anxious and uncertain about the future. I wasn’t about to say, “Don’t worry about it.”

But these are the words of Jesus and they seem pretty straightforward, don’t they? He really is saying that we shouldn’t worry about the basic necessities of life; food and clothing. It goes right in the face of our common sense which tells us to be prepared. How do we reconcile this troublesome saying with the way we live our lives?

Well, context helps here. Last week we heard the parable of the rich fool who stored up his grain in barns and trusted in it and himself. He didn’t look to God, and when he died his riches did him no good before God. And Jesus finishes the parable by saying “*So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.*” Then Luke goes into today’s reading, “*And he said to his disciples, ‘Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, etc.’*”

It is in light of the parable that Jesus tells His disciples not to be anxious, not to be worried, not to be concerned about their life, what they will eat or what they will wear. He holds up as examples the birds of the air and the flowers of the field, and how God takes care of them even though they give no thought to storing up food, clothing or wealth. He points out the high value our Father in heaven puts on us. To God we’re much more than birds or flowers. God looks upon us as His children! How loved and cherished by God we are! Of course God will care for us. So we are to trust in God for all things.

Yet, we still get anxious. Let’s face it, have you ever heard of a bird with a mortgage payment hanging over its head? Has a lily ever been told, “The meadow is going through some restructuring and we’ve eliminated your position. You’re being laid off.”? Every day we run into problems with our kids, spouses, parents or coworkers and we worry about how we’re going to deal with it. Career and financial

pressures are always on us. And just to keep things interesting, God allows the occasional hurricane or other disaster. It's hard not to worry. In fact, the idea that we don't worry about these things seems downright irresponsible, doesn't it? So how do we deal with this call of Christ to be at peace in the face of all these responsibilities, challenges and crises?

In struggling with this question, I kept thinking of Jesus' words "*I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.*" Consider the little children. They skin their knees and cry. They're anxious about it. A little girl misplaces her favorite doll and worries about it. Kids get in disputes with each other all the time and get upset. But what do they do?

"Moooooooooommy!" "Daaaaaaaaaaaaaddy!"

They cry for their parents in the midst of their trouble. They know just where to run for help, comfort and counsel. They trust that mommy and daddy can make things better. Moreover, they don't worry about their lives, what they will eat or what they will wear, because they know that their parents love them and will take care of these things. They deal with the little problems and crises and challenges that face them each day, but as far as the big picture stuff, they know Mom and Dad have that handled.

That's kind of how we have to view Jesus' call not to be anxious. We're God's children. We have plenty of problems and crises and challenges in front of us each day. We get anxious and worry and concerned about them and it's right that we go to God for help, comfort and guidance. And some of this stuff may even have to do with putting food on the table and clothes on our family's back. What we have to realize is that even these basic necessities of this life are not the big picture stuff.

Jesus says, "*For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.*"

His statement begs the question; what does Jesus consider life? And therein lies our key to understanding. What did Jesus come down to earth to do for us—keep us from being hungry or cold? Was it to keep us from being sick or dying? No. That's the little picture stuff.

That's why Jesus can say, "Do not be anxious." He came to take care of the big picture stuff. He came to take care of big picture life. The life Jesus sees for us is bigger and fuller than anything we can

imagine. Our little picture life is marked by all sorts of longings. But the big picture life Jesus is focused on is marked by fulfillment of every need. The little picture life is short but the big picture life is eternal. The little picture life is blotted and marred by sin and a spoiled relationship with God. The big picture life is pure and clean, a joyful dwelling forever in the presence of God.

Is the stuff of this earthly life unimportant? Not at all. God's Word deals with it all the time and directs us to be good stewards of His creation. We're told to be concerned about feeding and clothing the needy. We're directed to be good parents and that includes providing for our families. We're told to be good workers and to do those things our overseers direct us to do. But we are not to be anxious over such things as if they are the stuff of salvation. Our earthly life is a gift of God and we live it as best we can, but it pales in comparison to the life God has planned for us. We don't focus on the little picture, this short, incomplete and often painful life directly before our eyes everyday. *"Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you."*

Even in the midst of hardship and distress, we are able to lift our eyes and look to the big picture life God has planned for us. We seek God's kingdom, the eternal and perfect life prepared for us in heaven.

So if we're going to be anxious about something, we should be anxious about getting into heaven, right? Well that's the most wonderful part, we don't even have to be anxious about that. *"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."* Jesus can tell His disciples not to fear and not to worry, because Jesus knows what He is going to do in Jerusalem. Jesus is not only going to live the perfectly righteous and sinless life required to get into heaven, but through his suffering and death He is going to clear the way into heaven for all believers. If you or I had to earn our way into God's grace, we would certainly have reason to worry. It would be impossible. But God loves us so much that He gives us the way into the kingdom. He gives the very life of Christ His Son so that we don't have to worry. The price is paid. Through faith we have already been joyfully accepted into the

kingdom. Any need to worry about death is gone, cast aside when Christ forever defeated death through His rising to life on Easter morning.

Our Father in heaven takes care of His children in this world and the next. We need not be anxious. God will see to it that we have what we need to live the life He wants us to live here on earth. Will we always be happy and comfortable? Probably not, but we will always be on our way toward a better life in eternity with Him, so we need not worry. We know that through Christ Jesus' death and resurrection, our exit from this world of longing into paradise with Christ has been assured. Our Father did this for us because it is His good pleasure to dwell with His children. It is God's will. It has been made so. We have no worries.

Remember this as you go through your days. Deal with the stuff you deal with. Be concerned with getting done those duties and responsibilities that have been put on you. Struggle with the hardships big and small which are set before you every day. But know that your life, both this earthly one and the heavenly one, is in the hands of a heavenly Father intent on giving you the kingdom. Meet your challenges trusting that God carries you in the palm of His hand. Do not fear. Do not be anxious. Do not worry. There is no need. Jesus Christ has seen to it that ultimately you will rest in harmony and peace in the arms of your loving heavenly Father.