

**15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity: September 25, 2022**

**“Peace of God vs. Anxious Mammon”**

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus says, “*No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.*”<sup>1</sup> He then uses the flowers and the birds as our schoolmasters. It is the simple birds and the fragile flowers that become the teachers for us who place too much trust and strength within ourselves. We make our knowledge and our strength idols and Jesus humbles us with simple, flighty birds and delicate, flimsy flowers.

What is it that causes us anxiety? Is it not most often tied to things of our mind and our bodies? Our minds spin on knowledge that we don’t have, or with knowledge we have but don’t know what to do with it. Our bodies cannot do things we want them to, or no longer do the things they once could, and we struggle with losing independence.

Today’s gospel lesson is a blunt reminder of our dependence, which is actually a gift of God. When Jesus tells us not to be anxious, He is warning us against idolatry. Idolatry is the worship of a false god. From the first commandment, we recall that a god is whatever you fear, love, and trust in most. So, if you fear, love, and trust in the Lord, then your God is true. But if you fear, love, and trust in anything else more than God, that makes you an idolater. Sadly, that list is quite long and includes anything and everything that is not God—knowledge, strength, political ideologies, money, work, family, friends, power, leisure, and the list can go on and on.

Many of these things on this list are compiled into the god known as mammon. Jesus tells us that we cannot serve both God and mammon. Mammon is wealth in earthly things like money, goods, and property. Mammon is a false god, and an easily identifiable one. People fear, love, and trust in it. They fear not having enough money. They are afraid of not having enough stuff. They will not only monopolize their time serving the purpose of securing money and stuff, they will also clamor and fend off others for it. They will use it, even the thought of it, to strongarm others or to instill fear in others to motivate others towards their own, selfish ends.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 6:24

People love money and the things it can buy. With the adjustment this week to inflation and the pinch on families' buying power, the god of mammon loudly calls this week in many homes. Money is often loved and trusted in by constant devotion. How many will have apps tracking their money usage and keep diligent track of their checkbook balances and investments? Compare that to the time and effort given to the pursuit and strengthening of faith in God, and the Law condemns us all.

Mammon is not a kind and loving god. It's cold and heartless. It'll help the thief just as well as it helps the honest worker. It doesn't satisfy; the more you get, the more you want. It perishes, and so does everything that money can buy. At the end of the day, it needs to be recognized that the religion of mammon is a religion of works. It leaves no promises of continued grace. It promises no peace. It leaves its followers in constant anxiety of not having enough, or going to extreme lengths to keep what you have.

For these reasons and more, Jesus calls those who worship mammon to recognize its idolatry and return to the One, True God. When Jesus says, "Do not be anxious," He is telling you to stop serving and worshiping mammon. God is the God of peace, not one of anxiety.

Instead of worshipping a false god, which will fail you and will only make you more and more anxious, worship the one true God who provides for all your needs. We learn to confess in our Small Catechism, "I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, *and still takes care of them*. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil. All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true."

Mammon does not promise any of that. God may use money, or family, or friends, to provide some of those things, but the promise does not rest on those things. The promise is dependent on God. To show this dependence and the fulfillment of God's promise, Jesus bids us to look at the birds. They neither toil nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet our heavenly Father feeds them.

No one will argue this fact. We have a feeder outside our dining room window, which the squirrels seem to love more than the birds. But, we aren't the best at keeping it full. When it is empty, some of the birds will come back, but it takes a while, and even then, there don't seem to be as many; it fluctuates. The point is that the birds don't rely on us to provide, because they would probably starve. They instead rely on our Heavenly Father, who never fails to provide enough insects and seeds in the field.

Jesus then adds an important question, “*Are you not of more value than they?*” Well, are you or not? I would like to say this should be self-evident, but we know that it isn't. For those who believe that we evolved from the primordial ooze over billions and billions of years, sharing a single-celled ancestor with all living things, they do not believe that you are more valuable than the birds. They are willing to sacrifice many people, if it means the saving of one bird. We are inundated today with a reversal of the understanding of the question. Are you not more valuable than animals? The world says, “No. The animals are more important than humans.”

Consider our current climate. Government and people fight about whether babies in the womb are actually human life or not; yet, there is no argument whether a puppy inside a dog is a puppy. We are quick to protect animal babies, but not so quick to protect and defend human babies. The world is wrong, and so are all the mammon worshippers. You are vastly more valuable than many sparrows and so are each and every one of God's human babies at all ages. God desires to feed them and clothe them, as He does you. But how can you know this? How do you know that God cares for you, so that you don't need to go and serve another god?

This cross prominently displays the love of God in Christ Jesus for you, His children. The Son of God became incarnate of the Virgin Mary. He took on human flesh, and His little heart started beating around six weeks after His miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit. He lived the life full of temptation to anxious toil and uncertainty and He lived it perfectly. He kept the Law in every single detail. He was crucified for our transgressions. He died for our sins, our trespasses. Upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace.

The iniquities of all of us were laid upon our brother Jesus, who knows our sorrows and anxieties even more intimately than we know them. Our God was crucified and His beating heart was silenced, because He loves you. His desire is for you to be saved from sin and death and hell. He gave His entire being into death so that you may have peace eternally. The Holy Spirit uses St. Paul to declare to us, ***“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not with him graciously give us all things?”***<sup>2</sup>

God did not become a bird or a flower. He didn't die for the plants and animals. Yet, He still provides for them every day, as He has from the beginning of creation and will continue to do so until He makes the world new. How much more will God provide for you, for whom He has sent His Son to join your race and to die for you! How much more valuable does God find you than these countless birds and animals He faithfully feeds and cares for? Can you measure the value of God's own blood?

This is why Jesus tells us to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness with the promise that all the rest will also be added unto you. Death is all around. It filled our conversation at LWML on Monday. The leaves are turning and harvest is right around the corner as the plants die leaving the grain ready to be collected. We talked about September 11 and the attacks a few weeks ago. We even have shelves in stores and the yards of many neighbors that are beginning to fill up with reminders of death. Death comes and at a time that we do not know. Mammon will not be able to help when death comes, in fact, it cannot help. After death comes judgment and that is why we must seek the Kingdom of God now, while we can.

But how do we find the Kingdom of God? God's Kingdom is not something that we must travel distant lands to find, nor can we find it by being anxious or toiling after wealth. Rather, as our Small Catechism says, “God's Kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity.” God's Kingdom comes to you when He reigns as King in your heart. He does this through the power of the Gospel, that good message that God forgives all your sins and gives you eternal life for Christ's sake.

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<sup>2</sup> Romans 8:32

It is through the Gospel that the Holy Spirit comes to you, so that you live in God's Kingdom of Grace through faith. You find God's Kingdom in your Baptism, where Scripture promises that the Holy Spirit washed you in a new birth.<sup>3</sup> You find God's Kingdom where Christ feeds you His very body and blood in the Holy Sacrament, which was given up for you on the cross. You find God's Kingdom wherever this Gospel is preached in its truth and purity.

What about His righteousness? What is God's righteousness and how can we find it? Romans 1:16-17 answers us, ***“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’”*** You find God's righteousness in the Gospel of Christ. You receive this righteousness and make it your own when you believe in the Gospel. God is telling us to seek Him in the Gospel of Jesus, so that we know that He is our God who takes care of us yesterday, today, and forever.

To live in God's Kingdom of Grace is to be freed from the tyranny of the false god mammon, which burdens its followers with anxiety. Yet, we behave as if living in God's Kingdom is a burden that we scarcely have time for. We have started Catechism Class for the children and with it the memorizing of Luther's Small Catechism. Sadly, learning the Catechism by heart is a source of anxiety to some students. Why? Because we treat Catechism class like it is math, science, or history class. Instead of the children seeing this as seeking the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness, they see learning God's Word by heart as just another deadline to repeat what the teacher says, before promptly forgetting and moving on to the next subject.

Our school system teaches children to be anxious mammon worshipers, toiling at a desk with hopes that they'll get paid to toil at a desk someday. And we catechize our children to be anxious mammon worshipers at home, by how we behave, by what we talk about, and how we spend our time. This teaches our kids to toil for mammon, to be anxious about tomorrow, and to devalue God's Word as something not profitable to the aim of gaining wealth.

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<sup>3</sup> Titus 3:5

But we should not treat the Catechism as a textbook or going to church as a burden to be weighed against the mammon and pleasures of this life. The Catechism should be our book of prayer and the subject of our conversations at dinner. We go to church to be relieved from the load mammon seeks to lay on us. God's word gives us peace. Jesus' forgiveness gives us confidence in eternal life, let alone our daily care. And will God cause His Christians to starve or go naked? Will God cause you to lose your job and livelihood if you go to church every Sunday without excuses and have devotions each day? And even if God does send such a thing, Scripture teaches us that if we have food and clothing, with these we should be content.<sup>4</sup> Why? Because we know that for us who wait for the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, there is a crown of righteousness waiting for us.<sup>5</sup>

Brothers and sisters in Christ, He invites us today to throw off the burden laid on us by the false god mammon, and to take comfort in His promise of grace and forgiveness. His yoke is easy and His burden is light. Thus, we may sing together,

“What God ordains is always good:  
 Though I the cup am drinking  
 Which savors now of bitterness,  
 I take it without shrinking.  
 For after grief God gives relief,  
 My heart with comfort filling  
 And all my sorrow stilling.

What God ordains is always good:  
 This truth remains unshaken.  
 Though sorrow, need, or death be mine,  
 I shall not be forsaken.  
 I fear no harm, For with His arm  
 He shall embrace and shield me;  
 So to my God I yield me.”<sup>6</sup> Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Timothy 6:8

<sup>5</sup> 2 Timothy 4:8

<sup>6</sup> What God Ordains is Always Good LSB 760:5-6

**Prayer of the Church**  
**Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity**  
**25 September 2022**

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

O God, You have set Your reign and Your righteousness before us in the person of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us always look to Him who has saved us from our sins, constantly seeking Him above all things. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious Lord, You have poured out Your Spirit on Your Church, that the Gospel of Your kingdom would be believed throughout the world. Bless the proclamation of Your Word by the pastors and missionaries You have sent, that many would hear and believe. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, from whom all fatherhood on earth is named, bless the families of all Christians with Your promises. Give parents diligence and delight in their work, and grant Your favor on all children, that they may grow in strength and wisdom. Bless all widows, orphans and broken families also with Your mercy, and give them joy in the redemption You have won for us in Christ. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, our God, You desire that all nations would be Your people and walk in Your ways. Have mercy upon our nation. Bless our leaders with penitent hearts before You and with the fortitude to govern in Your wisdom and justice. Bless the citizens and sojourners of our land, that they might gladly love You and one another. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, we give thanks that in Holy Baptism we receive forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation, bless those who celebrate baptismal anniversaries this week, especially, *Kistie, Rylee, and Hutch*, We also thank and praise You for the gift of life and for the protection and care you have provided as *Cindy* celebrates her birthday. Grant that they may grow in grace, continue to know Your loving-kindness, abide in the confession of Your care and protection, serve You faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, Heavenly Father, we give thanks for the joy and blessings that You have granted *David & Sandy* during the years of their marriage. Assist them always by Your grace that with true fidelity and steadfast love they may ever honor and keep their marriage vows, grow in love towards You and for each other, and come at last to the eternal joys that You have promised; Lord in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, You have called us to bear one another's burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ. Comfort and console the sick and suffering, the recovering and all who have requested our prayers, *especially Marvin, Ruth, Zoey, Greg, Pastor Small (St. Silas, North Liberty), and those we name in our hearts.* According to Your good pleasure, heal and restore them. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Righteous God, fill us with joy as we approach Your altar this morning to receive the body and blood of Christ. Give us the peace that surpasses understanding, the gladness that no man can take from us, and the hope that does not fade away. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God, our heavenly Father, You have clothed creation in glorious dress and provide even more for all our needs of body and soul. Forgive us for our anxiety and worry. Help us always look to You for every good thing, trusting that, as our loving heavenly Father, You will never leave us without the things we need. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, You have forgiven our sins and delivered us from death through our Lord, Jesus Christ. Continue to pour out Your mercy upon us, grant to us all good things needful to this body and life, and keep from us all things harmful. From You, through You and to You are all things, O Lord, holy Father, mighty God; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who with You and the Holy Spirit is one Lord, one God, now and forevermore. **Amen.**