

Sermon Proper 14 2019

August 11, 2019

Luke 12:22-40

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson, previously read.

As we see our never-ending news cycle, something struck my eye in the past couple of weeks. A star in Hollywood actually stood up for saying that children as young as three shouldn't be given the opportunity by their parents to dictate their gender. In other words, he said something that we all have the sense is sane, that when a child is three they might not have the worldly experience and wisdom to know that they truly feel like a boy or girl. That's not to say there aren't more masculine girls, or more feminine boys, it's just to say that the idea that a parent would dramatically shift the whole life of a child around a statement that they feel a certain way at such a young age is illogical. But this statement, which was tempered and careful was not taken well by many in the media, and now that star was run through the ringer so thoroughly that he even apologized and is yet still facing backlash—including the possibility of losing one of his main jobs.

As I hear that, that reflects anxieties I have about our day and place. I hear things like this, I look at the increasing antagonism toward the biblical understanding of sexuality and gender and it makes me anxious. I worry what will come for us as the church. Will we as Christians be forced to conform to such ideologies or lose our jobs? Thankfully for the time being, I'm protected in what I can say by the Constitution, and I'd like to think that wouldn't change, but for a lay person to speak out can have dire consequences in our day. So I worry. I worry for the Church here, for you all, for my kids. I worry.

Then I also worry that since we have so much to speak of with regard to these issues, that we'll become overly self-righteous against them. For example, a friend of mine recently told me the story of someone he had met that had confessed to his wife of something like thirty years that he has and had always suffered from the temptation of same-sex attraction. What happened? His wife estranged herself from him, he lost his job at a Christian institution, and his church ostracized him. To be clear in this, he expressed no interest in divorcing his wife, he confessed no instance of infidelity to her, he showed no signs of desiring to give in to the temptations, he only acknowledged his struggle. Christians, how sad?! I know this wasn't in our congregation, and I pray that if it were, we would rally around such a person and encourage them in their desire to remain chaste and faithful, but still I worry.

I freely acknowledge I shouldn't worry. After all, Jesus said this is the way it will be. If we're doing it right, it's a mess. The world will hate us. Sometimes those in the "church" will hate us. You see we have to be in this hard spot of being too loving and gracious to please our legalistic tendencies, but faithful to the will of God set forth in the commandments such that we anger the sinful nature in ourselves and in others. And so we'll be anxious in this.

Of course as I mention this anxiety, I am guessing you can see the broader connection to the lesson, but we have to acknowledge that this isn't exactly what Jesus was talking about was it. No, He mentions more concrete anxieties, doesn't He—food and clothing? Now I went the direction I went because I'm guessing that most of you don't worry about food and clothing on a daily basis, do you? Most of you don't have to get up in the morning and wonder if you'll get a meal today. You don't have to worry about having clothes to wear. You might have to worry about which meal you should have for your health, or that the clothes you'd like to wear maybe are still in the laundry pile, but the real existential worry of these things isn't a reality for most of us, is it? Sadly that isn't the case for many people even here in America, and definitely wasn't for many in Jesus hearing. But for us it's different.

Isn't it interesting, then, how we still worry about this? How many of you had heart palpitations as the stock market seesawed over the last couple of weeks? How many of you worry that you're not saving enough or haven't saved enough for your retirement? And to tie this to what Jesus calls us to in the lesson today, how often do you not give as much to the Church or to other charitable organizations because you worry about that? As I say that, I know I sometimes mention the Tithe in the Old Testament, and I know that's not something still binding on us because Jesus fulfilled the entirety of the Law, but do you give ten percent of your income to the Lord and those in need first? Do you think that when God came up with that number He was being arbitrary? Do you think that's not hard to keep? Of course it is. Why? Because it requires faith to step out in trust that God will provide for you. And so you see, even though you don't worry about your next meal, you still worry. You're still anxious about this food and these clothes, just in a way that's different.

So ask yourself. Why? Why do you worry in this way? Does it extend your life by worrying about this? Does it make you live longer? Doesn't the Scripture tell you that God has the number of your days written in His book? Or as Jesus said in the lesson: **"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?"** If you can't make your life longer, then why do you worry so much? Jesus even makes

the point further: “**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!**” O you of little faith—and I love this in the Greek, it’s one word: oligopistoi; oligo as in few or small, like an oligarchy, and pistoi, belief. O ye of little faith.

Why are you of little faith? Why do you worry? Well, that’s easy, it’s your sin. You because of your sin can’t keep even that first commandment: you shall have no other Gods. That commandment that calls you to faith, to fear, love, and trust in God above all things. You can’t keep that. But that’s a bit simplistic. Why not? With regard to this it’s because of your conscience. You see your conscience knows that you’re a sinner. It knows the things that you’ve done wrong. It accuses you on a level and it tells you that you’re insufficient, you’re not good enough, God shouldn’t give you good things, He shouldn’t take care of you, He shouldn’t make sure that you’ll always be fed and clothed. And on the one hand because of your sin, you’re right, He shouldn’t. And on the other, because of your sin, you want to prove how worthy you are make sure that you take care of it, that God will respect your wisdom and your effort.

And in all of this, then we see the doubt. We see the doubt that thinks I have to trust in myself, my effort, my goodness to earn these things—and as I say this to be clear I’m speaking in theological terms. In earthly terms we should exert the effort in our work like it’s up to us, but theologically, we have to understand the reality. It’s up to our Lord. And there’s that doubt. And there’s the doubt that doesn’t trust that God will actually do this, that fears that this just won’t happen. Or there’s the doubt that thinks that I’ll actually be better off spending this money on things that will rot away so that I can have my temporary joys.

O ye of little faith, don’t doubt. Oligopistoi, don’t worry. Ye of tainted conscience, know that our Lord Jesus has bled and died that your conscience is free before God. O ye of fear, fear not. **Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.** Do you hear what Jesus says there? It’s the Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. It’s not just His pleasure to give nice things that will rot. It’s not just his pleasure to give you clothes that won’t last forever, to give you food that will be ultimately flushed in sewers. No, it’s His pleasure to give you the Kingdom! Something far better. And when your conscience rails against this, hear that. It’s His pleasure! He wants to do this! He doesn’t want to trick you with things, or tease you, He wants to give this to you!

And you can see it on the cross. O ye of little faith look at His love for you there. Look on the cross and what do you see? The God who has atoned for your sin. Think

about it this way. **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!**

As I say that, I was really struck by that this week. God shows the value, the worth of man in His eyes by becoming man! He didn't become bird or grass, He became human! O ye of little faith, look at this God, the God who took on your flesh, at the God who has given generously to you. And look at how generous He is. He has not only won this for you in Christ, but in the overabundance of His mercy, He has baptized you, made you His own. He has absolved you, He has fed you with His own body and blood. Grace upon grace, gift upon gift. Provision upon provision, eternally and temporally.

So look at this and realize what this means. What does it mean? It means that you can have faith. You can have what the letter to the Hebrews said, **"the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."** You can have that. When you're like Abraham, who we heard receiving the promise of offspring, you can trust the promise even when it all looks unfathomable. Think about it. Abraham was in his nineties when that came true. As the writer to the Hebrews said, **"as good as dead."** Even when you're as good as dead you can trust that God is able to do what He promises, and that He will do what He promises. You can have that faith.

And in that faith, this means that you can have confidence. You can have confidence in His daily provision. You can have confidence that He'll never leave you nor forsake you. You can have confidence then to be generous, because He will always care for you. You can have confidence in His love for you, His forgiveness even when you fall short of loving. In fact, in that confidence you can love more ably because you don't have to do these works of love given to us for any reason other than this is what God wants and your neighbor benefits from them.

And to tie back to my worries, this means that we can have confidence in this world that is changing so much. We can have confidence that as we love, even if we are hurt, God will take care of us. The confidence that if we confess faithfully, there might be many who will rail against it, but that's up to the Lord, and He knows that some will hear and believe. And we can have the confidence that Luther speaks of: "take they our life, goods, fame, child, and wife, though these all be gone, the vict'ry has been won, the Kingdom ours remaineth." Or as we just heard, **"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."** Amen.