

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen

The Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity (2021)

The Only Concern of the Christian is Eternal Life.

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“O you of little faith . . . do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” (Matthew 6:30b–34, ESV)

Our Lord Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount has shown us how to pray and He has instructed us not to lay up treasures on earth, but to lay up treasures in heaven, for earthly treasures are merely temporary, reminding us that, *“where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:21, ESV)* Therefore, should it surprise us when He 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. You cannot serve God and money.” (Matthew 6:24, ESV)*

When one reads the Greek text of this passage there is something quite notable about the choice of verbs our Lord uses for describing the effect of trying to serve two masters. Each of the verbs, “hate, love, devoted, and despise” are future indicatives. That is, if you try to serve two masters, these things will happen. So should it surprise us that when we try to build up earthly treasure in lieu of heavenly treasure not only does it create strife and anxiety, but it changes our focus from that which truly matters; our eternal, heavenly existence, to that which is at best temporary, our earthly existence. Thus, here our Lord gives us sound, saving advice, focusing on our heavenly Father removes the anxieties of earthly living. Oh, but if we could only do this!

Jesus says, serving two masters leads to conflict. When these two masters are God and money it leads one to ask, “should I live by faith, or should I live by life’s necessities? Can I find a happy medium between the two? Will these two masters allow me to please them both? Or will trying to serve two masters make me a poor servant?” Not only is it confusing, but it is difficult to store up treasure on earth while trying to store up treasure in heaven.

In the fourth petition of the Lord’s Prayer we pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” which reminds us that the material things of life, our daily bread, is of great concern to us. Against such worry Luther reminds us that when we pray the fourth petition, we pray knowing that “God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.” That is our day-to-day sustenance, our shelter, and our clothing which we receive by the grace of God and therefore, we should thank Him. But all too often we forget the truth of these words and begin to plot and scheme (some people call it planning) to ensure that our daily bread is forthcoming. Such planning often brings on worry, it often brings on anxiety.

There is no escaping it, our legitimate cares of daily life often become worries. It’s easy to tell people not to worry, but it’s not always easy to help them stop worrying. Sometimes it’s a matter of temperament: some are more inclined to worry than others; some are just worry-warts. Furthermore, a person’s physical condition often influences their outlook on life: those who are

sickly or disabled look more pessimistically toward the future. But basically, worrying flows from our sinful nature.

As we heard in the Old Testament Reading for today when Elijah asked the widow for bread and water, she protested because she only had enough flour and oil for herself, and her son. Her plan was to prepare the last of her meager food for her son and herself then she and her son would simply lie down and die. That's it, there is no more, all our food is gone, so let's die! How sad. Was this a reality check or a lack of faith? Had she in prayer asked God to provide? Undoubtedly, she believed in God, for she said to Elijah, "***As the LORD your God lives.***" (***1 Kings 17:12, ESV***) Perhaps she thought God was only Elijah's God and not hers. Perhaps she thought she was unworthy of God's attention? Such questions are rhetorical, but there is one thing for certain, this widow had given up on serving God. Her concern was for earthly things and these she thought had now abandoned her. So, let me and my son die in peace. How many people do you know who have reached the same point as this widow?

But unbeknownst to her, God had not given up on her. He had not abandoned her. She was still His daughter and He still loved her.

In the midst of her depression, her anxiety, Elijah told her, "***Do not fear; go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make something for yourself and your son***" (***1 Kings 17:13 ESV***). As He had planned, the Lord provided for Elijah, the widow, and her son. He did so until the drought was broken in the third year and during that time the widow's cannister and flask of flour and oil never ran out. She was always able to make bread. In the midst of her poverty, her lack of food, the Lord provided. So just as Elijah told the widow, Our Lord Jesus tells us; "***do not be anxious about your life,***" (***Matthew 6:25 ESV***).

When someone places their trust only in material things our Lord Jesus rebukes them, saying, do not worry about such things; do not worry about food, clothing, shelter, etc. because eternal life is far more important than worldly, material things. Pointing us to God's Creation, our Lord Jesus uses birds as an example, saying, "***Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?***" (v. 26) Fact is you are! You have a soul; a soul God wants to save for His heavenly home. Moreover, He also asks, "***And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?***" (v. 27) Fact is none of you can. Since this is true, why do you worry about life? Why do you ask, "***What shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we wear?***" (v. 31) Instead of being anxious about such things, seek them from your heavenly Father through prayer, because "***your heavenly Father knows that you need them***" (v. 32) and He will provide. To live this way is to live a life of faith. Moreover, our Lord tells you; the truth is, it does no good to worry or to be concerned about tomorrow; "***for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble,***" (v. 34) So our Lord cries out, "***O you of little faith?***" (v. 30) "***seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you***" (v. 33).

Of course many ask, "Well pastor; is it really wrong to worry? Truth is pastor I'm worried about my job; the economy hasn't been very good. I'm worried about my children's education; our children aren't being taught as they should be. I'm worried about inflation, every time I go to the store prices have increased and my purchasing power is diminished. I'm worried about the state of our country and the world. It seems that everywhere I look there are wars or disasters or famine or drought or....." However, if we let the worries of the world consume us, we only hurt ourselves by wallowing in self-inflicted sins. God reminds us; "***Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord***" (***Psalms 32:10 ESV***). Truth

is it is a useless waste of time and energy to worry. When you worry you place yourself among unbelievers, doubting God's ability to come to your aide. Moreover, you seek to lay up for yourself treasures gained solely by your own efforts. Such treasures are perishable. Therefore, do not consume yourself seeking worldly treasures because, ***"where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"*** (Matthew 6:21 ESV).

Understanding that it is wrong to worry, then you might ask, "Why do Christians still worry when they know it is sinful, useless, and harmful?" The answer is simple; we are saints and sinners simultaneously. In this life we are not and never will be sufficiently heavenly minded. We worry too much because our sanctification is incomplete, and we do not make our spiritual life and our soul's eternal salvation our chief concern, but rather too often we make our temporal and secular life; it's joys and comforts, our chief concern. Speaking of those who live this way, St. Paul says, ***"Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things"*** (Philip. 3:19 ESV). But this is not the way of the Christian. Although we live in this world, subject to the curses of this world, St. Paul reminds us, ***"Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ"*** (Philip. 3:20 ESV). Therefore, our Lord urges us to set aside our cares and worries and, ***"seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness."*** *The Only Concern of the Christian should be Eternal Life.*

The Kingdom of God, this sounds great, but just exactly what is the Kingdom of God? First of all, it is a kingdom far too few have citizenship in. It is a kingdom of living faith in God, a kingdom in which its citizens trust in God above all things, especially for those things of body and soul. It is a trust established by a Holy Spirit given faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the Altar of the Cross. It is a kingdom in which its citizens have rid themselves of all their earthly cares and worries, laying them in the shadow of the cross where the Lord Jesus has taken them up, along with their sins, to be remembered no more!

Again, our Lord tells us, ***"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"*** (Matthew 6:25 ESV) Yes, our lives and bodies are more important than food or clothing, but there is one divine food which we should always seek: the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ given to us in and under the bread and wine of Holy Communion. That is the food that nourish unto eternal life; a food that is given for the forgiveness of sins. Furthermore, we should always delight in the truth that we were clothed with the robe of Christ's righteousness in the waters of Baptism. This divine and eternal clothing is all we need for it covers the nakedness of our corrupt flesh and makes us presentable to God Almighty.

The cares and worries of earthly life need not burden us because our heavenly Father has resolved all our cares and worries through the atoning sacrifice of His only begotten Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, whose death upon the Altar of the Cross reconciled all mankind to God and opened the door to the kingdom of God to all who are called to faith and given the gift to believe. In this life man has not seen the serenity and peace that exists in God's kingdom of glory, but such is promised to all who repent and believe. In this life, in the kingdom of God's grace, believers have no need to be concerned with the cares of the world for they are just passing through on their way to heaven. Trusting in Christ and laying aside the concerns of this world, *The Only Concern of the Christian is Eternal Life.* In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.