

The Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity  
20 September, Anno Domini 2020  
St. Matthew 6:24-34  
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

I think we all need to hear these words of Jesus every day. We are filled with worry and anxiety about a lot of things these days, not a one of which we can change by our worrying. Our jobs. Vaccines. Our children. The upcoming elections. Masks. Race wars. Government corruption. Our death. Our neighbor's death. We lose sleep. The sale of anti-anxiety medication is through the roof and counselors' schedules are booked solid. Is it really any wonder? Largely stuck at home for the last 6 months, we turn on the television or scroll through Facebook and Twitter and we are bombarded with the constant message - everything is terrible, the world is on the brink of destruction, **YOU SHOULD BE TERRIFIED!**

And we get swept away in the torrent. We let our hearts be torn away from the solid rock of Christ and His promises. We get tossed and tumbled in the churning waters of fear. We panic. We think and conduct ourselves as though God our Savior has lost all control and can no longer help us. We live as though Christ had not been raised from the dead and now sits on His heavenly throne as Lord over all creation. We give God's seat to these troubles and our worrying about them. We deny God in our hearts. We grasp desperately for anything that might save us - rights, masks, enough money, vaccines, the Constitution, the right politicians, food, health. And to be sure, Jesus' words bring with them judgement against our unbelieving hearts. We are forced to sheepishly admit that we have accused God of failing and lying, that the birds and lilies demonstrate a more constant faith than the Baptized. Worry is idolatry. It declares that God is neither able nor willing to care for whatever it is that you are troubled about. It declares that the source of your trouble is actually the true god and it alone can bring you good.

But Jesus only here gently rebukes God's children. These words are meant just as much, and even more, to be like a soft pillow for us to lay our wearied hearts and minds upon. O you of little faith! Stop worrying. Stop panicking. Stop letting your heart get tied up in knots as though Jesus didn't rise from the dead, as though God is still holding your sins over your head, as though your life is in your own hands and not in the gracious hands of the one who made you. Think about the horribly difficult life of a bird. It has to sleep outside in the scorching heat and

bitter cold. It doesn't wake up to a refrigerator and pantry filled with delicious food. It is constantly having to keep an eye out for predators. Is any of that true of you? Yet the birds don't nervously store up food and fret over the decorations of their nests. They don't scrimp and scratch and save as much as they possibly can because who knows what tomorrow may bring. God the Father simply feeds them their daily bread. That's sufficient. The Almighty Creator of all things in heaven and on earth notices when even the tiniest sparrow falls to the ground. Do you notice? Do you even care? Even more, consider the intricate beauty that God lavished on the lilies or the dandelions which you and I are more than happy to run our lawn mowers over and destroy. Do these plants do anything to be what they are and take our breath away at their sight? They do nothing. God clothes them - each and every one of them.

Which of these has sinned against God? Which of these have grumbled about what they didn't get? Now consider yourself. You have grumbled. You have rebelled. You have despised God. And yet, God willingly poured out the Blood of His beloved Son to forgive you, to clothe you with the righteousness of Jesus. For which of the birds or flowers did your Heavenly Father do that? The Lord didn't even offer His Son for the fallen angels. They rebelled and He immediately cast them into hell. It was your flesh that was taken up by the Son of God. It was you for whom He allowed Himself to be nailed to the tree. It was your sin that He paid for. It was the chains of your death that He broke. It was your grave that He opened. What more could God do to demonstrate His love for you? What more could He do that would prove that there isn't anything that you need to be afraid of?

It is not only silly, it is demonic to worry, to call God a liar and carry on as though He will not give you daily bread though He has never once failed to do so for any of children, sometimes even doing it miraculously, using, ironically, the birds. We say "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth" but the truth is that our hearts are torn, trying to serve God and our fears, trying to trust God AND gain ourselves peace by having the things of the world - money, popularity, health, power, even life itself. If your heart only rests when these things are satisfactorily secure, then your heart is in the wrong place. And so often they are. The allegiance of our hearts is torn. Our flesh looks around at the chaos, the unrest, the instability, the threats and it suddenly forgets God. We give those things power over our peace and contentment. Thus we betray the one who created us, the one who humbled Himself to take on our weak flesh, the one who spilled His own Blood to redeem us and save us from the worry and fear and dread of death.

Dearly beloved of God, stop worrying. Let your hearts rest in the only place they actually can - in the Lord God who has revealed His love for you in Jesus Christ. None of those things you are anxious about have any power over you. Your life is safely hidden in the hands of Almighty God who rules over all these things. Consider that all history, as bad as it appeared, God was directing toward the purpose of Jesus death for our salvation, which itself seemed terrible at the moment but now we understand to be the most glorious event in all history.

Nothing has changed. You are still forgiven. The evil world is overcome. The devil is defeated. There are riots and viruses and bad governments and broken bodies. But the Lord Jesus is still Lord over all of them and each and every one of them will serve His good and gracious will for you, sometimes even being the vehicle by which He shepherds you out of this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven. In fact, it is actually when all our other idols are failing us and things seem most hopeless that we can see Christ most clearly as our one and only support and help in need. Jesus' words today draw you to rest in Him so that no matter what evil befalls you, no matter how you may struggle, you need not fear or worry. Instead, you may confidently be at peace because your heavenly Father loves you with an everlasting love and nothing in heaven or on earth can separate you from Him or His care. You are a child of the resurrection and your guaranteed future is eternal life. Don't let anything take that from you. Don't let anything rob you of that promise which Christ spilled His Blood to make to you.

In the Name of +Jesus.