

The Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity
17 September, Anno Domini 2023
St. Matthew 6:24-34

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Children of the heavenly Father,

There isn't a single one of you in this room that isn't bearing some great weight either for yourself or for someone you love. There is grief. There is fear. There is doubt. There is division. There is frustration. The chaos and suffering worked by sin everyday seem to be an endless tsunami, threatening to wash you away.

It's important to note this morning that Jesus doesn't say "Care nothing at all about food or drink or clothing." You are to give thought to those things. You are supposed to be about your jobs and vocations. You are to be good stewards of His gifts. You are to be attentive to your children. Don't spend beyond your means. You are to concern yourself with the needs of your neighbor.

What Jesus is rebuking in us is the disordered care of these things. When Jesus says "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness...", he literally means that your first concern should be the things of God and then you can give thought to clothing and food and drink in light of the things of God. Because the reality is that while you cannot add a single day to the span of your life, there is one who can - God your heavenly Father who loves you and gives good gifts to His beloved children. Your worrying about anything does nothing to help you or make a situation better. Filling yourself with the Word of God and calling upon Him in every trouble - these truly do help. Indeed, your worry robs you of the opportunity of seeing the good that your Father has in fact provided for you and around you. Your worry robs you of the peace that is yours in Christ who has overcome death and the devil and your sin.

When you order your thoughts and your heart toward God, then your care for all the other things, which He knows you need and provides in due time and season, will find their proper place in your heart. And when your concern is for the things of God first, then you will have no need to worry and be anxious about money or health or food or jobs or politics. You will understand those things in light of your heavenly Father and His good and gracious will.

We can't have a healthy relationship with creation if we do not first have a proper relationship with the Creator. As Jesus says, your heart has place for only one god. And if the wrong god occupies that space you will only be filled with worry because it is a false god, completely incapable of doing for you what you hope. Only one God can help you. Only one God can save you. Only one God can redeem you. And there is no god besides Him - Father, +Son, and Holy Spirit.

Many times you will be able to feel when your god is wrong. Heartburn. Anxiety. Panic attacks. Irritableness and grumbling. Sleeplessness. Anger. Discontent. These and other symptoms often come about because our hearts are unsettled and worried about things that are happening or that we simply imagine might happen. Other gods are very good at disguising themselves so that we aren't even aware that we are servants to them (which is really the way the devil likes it). One such example is renaming greed things like "frugality" or even "being a good steward". These idols are even more dangerous because they lay hidden, eating away at faith, distracting us from Christ using Christ's Name. That is why constant, daily examination is necessary for the Christian, so that we are not duped into idolatry.

And that examination is not simply an inward look at the heart. Quite often there are external markers that if we will pay attention to, we will be able to see if we are living the life of faith and contentment in relation to our daily bread. What do I mean by that? Consider food. Do I eat to care for my body or to alleviate hunger or do I eat emotionally or gluttonously as though food will make me feel better or because I don't believe there will be food next time? On the other hand, do I obsess about food and look at this good gift of God as my enemy who must be conquered and resisted as much as possible? Both are wrongheaded approaches built upon idolatry. Both approaches give food or the absence thereof power over your life. The church's budget and your own budget can quickly tell whether the kingdom of God and His righteousness are first in our hearts or secondary or if they are even considered at all. Does the church prioritize those things that support the preaching of the Gospel or fluff that we think the world will be impressed by? Or on the other side, do we confuse good stewardship with doing everything as cheaply as possible? Your calendar can work in much the same way. What gets the majority of your time? What gets little to none of your time? What of our clothing? Are our clothes or more generally our appearance a source of pride and vanity? Do we dress modestly at all times? Or do we give no thought or care to our appearance at all, going everywhere as "casual" as possible, giving ourselves to slovenliness which only demonstrates that neither God nor our neighbor is important or worthy of our respect? Children, are you filled with anxiousness about your grades and doing everything perfectly? Or do you give no thought or care to applying yourself

to your duty as a student? Do you obsess over your phones in a fear of missing out? Do you worry about not having enough people like your posts?

The list, of course can go on and on. Every facet of our lives can serve as a marker, helping us see what our priorities are and what they are not. God certainly bestows many good and gracious gifts upon us day by day. Chief among these are the promises of our Baptism and His Holy Word. These are to receive the firstfruits of our thoughts, our time, our money, our energy and our love. He also gives us clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all that we have. And while those are good, they are not the one thing needful - Christ and His Word. Only His Word gives eternal life. Only His Word takes away the guilt and sting of sin. Only His Word can bestow peace in the midst of your fears and worries. Only His Word can bring joy and hope in the midst of deep sorrow.

Your Savior, invites your worried and anxious heart to rest in Him who has promised to give you every good and perfect gift. There will be plenty of time after you have given your heart and mind to the things of God to be about your vocations and to care about clothing and food and drink and anything else that needs or is actually worthy of your attention. It is when we seek first the things of this world that we actually become filled with anxiousness and worry because you learn that in the end you don't have control over those things like you thought you did or should. These are the things that fill the hearts of pagans, who chase after these idols as though there is no higher good. That's why the world is so filled with anxiety and anger and depression and violence. People are continually chasing after gods that don't exist and can't do anything for them, which leaves them feeling more and more hopeless and out of control. The desires of their hearts are completely disordered.

Do not be like them. You have heard the gracious Word of the God who made you, who knit you together in your mother's womb, and who laid down the life of His only-begotten Son to redeem you. You have been given the Holy Spirit to rule and direct your heart toward the true and living God. You wear the royal robe of Christ's righteousness because Jesus was stripped naked and humiliated in the eyes of the world, having no form or beauty that we should desire Him. He was so marred by the hatred of man and the sins of mankind which were laid upon Him that no one could even bear to look upon Him. You feed on the rich food of His Body which hung on the cross for your salvation and rose again from the dead. You drink the fine wine of His Blood which poured out of His sacred veins as a guilt offering on your behalf. Why, dear children, why then do you worry and run

about chasing after things that are here today and gone tomorrow? Repent and turn your heart toward the things of God. Then filled and content with His righteousness you will know that there is no need to worry about anything in this world because there is nothing, not even death itself, that God will not work for your good. You will know that everything you see around you is under the watchful eye and gracious keeping of God your heavenly Father.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keep you hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.