

St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)
Trinity 15 – Sept 17, 2023
Matthew 6:24-34 – Do Not Be Anxious
Pastor Peter Wagner

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

It may be nothing new, but greed and covetousness consume our nation. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Corporations only benefit their stakeholders, they rarely have concern for the wellbeing of their employees. Small businesses are unable to compete. And the working class suffers. Never has it been so clear that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to inherit the kingdom of heaven.

And the poor know they are being abused. They know they are underpaid, that the token salary increases they get do not even beat the rate of inflation. But they often react with the same greed as the rich. They react with bitterness and envy. Some demand the government to step in and get for them what they deserve. They do not trust God, and they are not content with what they have.

So the rich take whatever they can get, the poor covet what they do not have, and everyone is out for themselves to get what they think they deserve.

It shall not be so among us. We are called to love one another, as Christ loved us. We must not seek the covetous desires of the heart. In ancient times, Christians in the Roman empire created their own micro economies to escape the cycle of greed. Perhaps we should begin to think about ways to support one another in the church in the same way.

But we are still in the world, and we lament over the consequences of greed in society. We grieve over the suffering it brings. In so many families, both parents feel forced to work. Often each parent tries to hold more than one job. So their children grow up in daycare, not Christian homes. People exhaust themselves, harming their health and relationships, all in pursuit of money. And mental health spirals out of control, so that depression and anxiety have become chronic.

The situation is awful, and we easily get dragged in. We get pulled into the cycle of greed and anxiety, especially about employment, income, finances, and the future. We worry because we wish these things were under control. We wish we were in control.

And our anxiety reveals that we do not keep the first commandment. We do not really believe God is in control. We do not fear, love, and trust in him alone, we do not believe that he is our Father. We want to be able to trust ourselves. So when things are beyond our control, we succumb to anxiety. Because we discover that we are not God.

Jesus gently sums it all up when he tells us not to be anxious, "If God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore 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."

There is a good God who is in control. Our loving heavenly Father. If we believed in him, our worries would melt away. Not that our problems would disappear, but we would learn to trust his care.

So do not be anxious. The birds of the air neither sow nor reap, yet your heavenly Father provides all they need. We see it when he sends rain to bring relief in time of drought. You know that times of trouble have come and gone, but our God has always been with us.

Above all, do not be anxious about money. Do not spend your life in pursuit of it. Instead of thinking you must work so many jobs, perhaps find a way to stay at home and live frugally with your family, raising your children in the faith. Instead of suffering for a few more years to get full retirement benefits, perhaps retire sooner and enjoy the days God gives you with your spouse. Be content with what you have. Seek first the kingdom and his righteousness.

For you can only have one master. You cannot serve both God and money. When mammon becomes our God, we are no longer serving the true master. We are pursuing what moth, rust, and time will destroy. So ask yourself what you would do if the stock market crashed, or if your home was destroyed, or your possessions lost. Would you despair? Or could you confess with Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

It is one thing to engage in wise financial planning, it is another to put our trust in our savings or retirement accounts. Then our bank account is our god. This trap ensnares so many. It ensnares congregations too. Churches get so wrapped up in creating rainy-day funds that they forget why God has given them money. God entrusts it to us to use it for his purposes. So when a congregation receives offerings or gifts, we should set aside a tithe. Just as each Christian can learn to trust God's provision by tithing, congregations also benefit from it. Give away a percentage to support a Lutheran charity, or another congregation, or a missionary. And then, rather than saving the rest, look for a way to spend it wisely for the work of the church. Or use it to care for the poor, especially those who are of the household of faith.

And do not be anxious about the future. Sufficient for today is its own trouble. Do not worry about what offerings will look like next year. God will provide, because he is the Lord of the church. He who has preserved our congregation through times of plenty and scarcity for the past 128 years will surely be with us in the years to come.

Seek the kingdom and his righteousness. For Jesus is the kingdom of heaven. He embodies the righteousness of God. He is our God. Fear, love, and trust in him above all things.

And Jesus speaks to us so lovingly, he chides us so tenderly. O you of little faith, let me take care of you. Let me strengthen the little faith you have. Trust me for all you need to support this body and life. Learn what it really means to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." I laid down my life for you, to give you my body as your living bread. If I give you such rich food for your forgiveness in communion, can I not also give you the simple things you need?

"Give us this day our daily bread," means to go out with the Israelites and gather just one jar of manna each day for each person, so that those who gathered much had none left over, and those who gathered little had no lack. "Give us this day our daily bread," means to trust God like the widow of Zarephath, using her last flour and oil to bake a morsel of bread for Elijah. And "Give us this day our daily bread," means to consider the birds of the air, that they neither sow nor reap, but your heavenly Father gives them all their food.

And through it all, remember that God is not the father of the birds and the grass. Not in the same way the he is your father. He is the father of the baptized. You know how you stand before God. You stand as a son, justified by the blood of the only begotten. Baptism into Christ and his death gives you the right to call God Father. Only Christians can pray, "Our Father, who art in heaven." Unbelievers cannot. Only Christians can lay claim to all his promises.

For we know that our good and gracious God has always provided. Far more than we could ask or desire. And since we belong to Christ, since we are sons, we can trust him and ask for whatever we need. We can expect to keep receiving good things from God's hand. The abundant earthly blessings we have show that we should also pray for heavenly blessings. Pray confidently and boldly, and ask for still greater gifts. "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"

So do not be timid in your prayers. Do not stop with "Give us this day our daily bread," but pray also for greater gifts. Pray that God's kingdom come, that his will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Pray that the devil be driven from all hearts, that God put an end to the world's greed and covetousness, that unbelievers be converted, that the gospel go out into all nations, that those who have left the church repent and return, that hard hearts be softened, and that the church would always confess Jesus Christ boldly and faithfully.

Pray for these great things each day in your homes, as you enjoy the simple things God has already given. Pray when you sit down to eat, and when you go to bed. And be confident that your God is ready and eager to give whatever you ask in the name of Jesus. "Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it."

And finally, trust Jesus, who is your God, who gave himself for you. For he has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. And God has put all things under his feet. Therefore if even death has been put under his feet, surely all things are subject to him. All the world is under his care, and he will put an end to all greed and covetousness.

So fear not, little flock. He who forgives us our trespasses will not lead us into temptation, but will deliver us from every evil, for to him belong the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.