

Epiphany 8 A
February 27, 2011
Family of Christ Lutheran Church, Chanhassen, Minnesota
Pastor Kristie Hennig

Matthew 6:24-34: Safe in God's Hands



A couple of years ago,
this part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount was the text
for my sermon at the community Thanksgiving service
which was held over at St. Hubert's Catholic Church.

Since I was hosting the family turkey feed the next day,
coming up with a litany of my own worries was no problem.
Most of them involved getting all the food
prepared in the right quantities
and delivered to the table simultaneously at the correct temperature.
But I had concerns about everything from
my guests' safety on snowy roads...
to the tarnish on my silverplate,
from the flavoring in my new dressing recipe...
to the zest of fam-damily dynamics.
It was easy for Jesus to say, "Do not worry," I said a bit haughtily;
he'd never put Thanksgiving dinner on the table!

Months later I was introduced to a member of the community
who said he'd heard that sermon and remembered it – and me! --
because he *hadn't* relate to the anxiety I had so carefully described.
"Didn't get much out of it," he told me.

Which made me wonder if my obsessive worry about
lumps in the gravy and mismatched place settings

mattered very much to *Jesus*, either.

Were *they* the kind of worries that Jesus was talking about when he taught the disciples – and us -- on the hillside that day?

I went back to look at the passage.

Turns out...

Jesus isn't telling me to relax and stop worrying about just any old thing I might be obsessing about *so that I can enjoy life.*

He had something particular in mind.



Listen again to verse 24: “You cannot serve both God and mammon.”
Mammon: wealth, that is. Property. Stuff.

Verse 25: *Therefore*, he says,

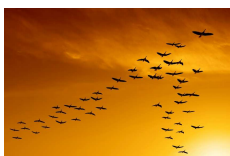
“Do not worry about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, or about your body, what you will wear...”

If you want to serve God,

keep the main thing the main thing.

And the main thing isn't what's on the outside.

Don't get distracted by the shiny objects in your peripheral vision;
keep your eyes on God.



Raise your heads.

Look *up* at the birds and *into* the faces of pansies and coneflowers...
that's where you'll find God.. .

waiting patiently for you to find your way home.
Because there's no place like it.

The Greek word translated “worry” in our English Bibles means
“anxiety” all right –
but it comes from a root that means “to divide.”
So at a deeper level,
When Jesus says “Do not worry”,
it means more than, “Don't fret about things you can't control.”
It means,
“Do not be distracted,
do not divide your loyalty,
do not split your attention.
Put aside your other gods, and focus on what gives *life*.
Ditch mammon and serve God only.
Strive first for the kingdom of God...
and watch what happens to your laundry list of concerns.”

I don't think Jesus is calling the bunch of us
to withdraw from the consumer culture we live in.
“Use money wisely,” he'd say.
Plan for your financial future, of course.
But guard against making wealth and its trappings a goal, a destination.
Money *itself* isn't evil.
But it's fast on its feet,
and it can run us ragged if we take the bait...
and end up spending our lives chasing after its empty promises.

When we give our allegiance and worship to money and what it can buy,
that's when we leave our minds vulnerable to scarcity thinking –
that is, what we *don't* have.
Scarcity thinking sees the glass as half empty.
Scarcity thinking says,
“There's never enough” and “The pie is only so big.”
Some would say that train of thought has shaped

our economics and our politics in recent years.
We borrow against tomorrow
to have the shiny things that catch our eye today.
Because what we have never feels like enough,
and we struggle with feeling that *we* aren't enough either.
And we desperately want to fit in,
we long to be accepted.
We know that there are people who need the basics,
but we may be hesitant to share...
because we are afraid if we do,
there might not be enough for *us*.



Jesus provides an alternative.
God knows we need food and water and clothing...
and love and acceptance and purpose and safety.
God provides for those needs, Jesus points out.
Trust God.
Seek God's face, he says.



Get in line with God's kingdom on earth,
and watch God's abundance gush,
filling your cup to overflowing.

Allan Law is a man who can tell you how abundant thinking works.

Last Wednesday,
our confirmation students and their Life Guides
heard Mr. Law tell his story of feeding the hungry in our inner cities...
making 70 stops a night, 363 nights a year,
passing out sandwiches from his van
to young friends and old strangers, tough guys, grandmas raising their
grandbabies...
who never ask what kind of sandwich they're getting,
but always say thank you.

When the shelters are full in the winter,
he gives people \$2 to ride the bus all night so they can stay warm.
During the day, Law runs an activity program for at-risk kids,
buys them clothes and backpacks.

He funds his projects using his teacher's pension
and proceeds from selling some of his own property.
Scout troops and churches like ours make the sandwiches
for him to deliver on his nightly rounds.

Last week, the FOC group made 1500 sandwiches in 25 minutes – which
may be good enough for a spot in the Guinness Book of World Records,
Mr. Law said.

Then we packed those sandwiches in that van of his.

“I truly believe that God put me on this earth to help the poor,” he says.
“I will do that until the day I die.”

Mr. Law is laser-ed in on the kingdom of God.
He is not distracted by old mammon.
His allegiance is not divided.

He knows that come Judgment Day,
God won't ask him what kind of car he drove,

or the square footage of his house,
or the style of the clothes in his closet.
God won't ask what his highest salary was,
or his job title,
or how many Facebook friends he had.

But Allen Law knows that God will be interested
in how he treated his neighbors.

People worry about him wandering around Minneapolis all night.
Our kids wanted to know if he'd ever been robbed or beaten up.
Only once, he told them.
“Aren't you afraid?” they asked.

“Na. It's a strange life, but I think I am doing the Lord's work. I'm
happy.”

Mr. Law sees scarcity every day.
But his cup of compassion overflows.
And because he trusts the One who feeds the birds and dresses the
flowers,
God's kingdom comes closer every day...
and every night as he makes his sandwich run.
The added value in this for Mr. Law: He isn't plagued by worry.

This is good news for those of us
who have too much, yet are poor in spirit.



In this Family of Christ we are on a journey,

learning to put God's work ahead of our own worries about the externals that can hook us.



Even our church council frets -- lately, it's been about money, as you know.

We know that God provides AND we know that this is a generous congregation.

But still we worry when cash flow isn't what we wish it would be.

With four mission trips depending on the all-church musical, we worried about finding the money to produce *The Wizard of Oz*.

But a generous couple in our church wrote a check and creativity has gushed.

In council, we're on a journey to redirect our thinking away from scarcity towards God's abundance.

In our monthly meetings now,

we don't talk about the treasurer's report

until *after* we've talked about the congregation's mission and ministries, the work God has called and equipped us to do here.



It's winter. I'll grant you that.

But I'm here to tell you that *even now*
God is at work doing a new thing,
bringing life from death,
a fountain gushing up through the snow to new life,
putting the lie to our worries.

God's abundance is bubbling up in a million ways, large and small.

I invite you to look up, then inside:
engage your brain,
find your courage,
wear your heart on your sleeve...
and click your heels three times.



Because there's no place like home -- safe in God's hands.

Thanks be to God!
Amen.

