

The Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity
St. Matthew 6:24-34

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the holy Ghost. Amen.

Worrying is a part of life, or so it seems. People worry about paychecks and taxes. People worry about security and freedom. Some people even worry about the food they need for their next meal, whether they'll be warm that night to sleep, or even if they'll have a roof over their head and a bed to sleep in that night.

Then Jesus comes along and says, "Therefore I say to you, do not worry 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?" I suppose you could add shelter, security, and freedom to that list, too. When it comes to the necessities of life, you need not worry.

Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

The birds are fed by the providence of God. Even the lilies of the field are decked out in raiment more glorious than anything that Solomon ever wore. These need not worry—these creatures of the third and fifth days—and you, more valuable than they, a creature of the ultimate day of creation, need not worry either about food or clothing. God gives these "lesser life forms" what they need; He will certainly give you everything that you need.

But you, you probably don't realize just how good you have it. If God were to remove from you the vast majority of your earthly possessions, would you still acknowledge him as a good God who provides richly for all of your needs? He would only remove the dross—all that is not necessary to your life—but would still provide for all of your needs of body and soul. So, of course He would be the one who provides richly for all of your needs, but this removal of dross would no doubt be a great blow to you and "a spiritual challenge of the first order," as Dr. Jeffrey Gibbs put it.

Still, Jesus says, "Don't worry about it." You will still have exactly what you need.

But, as there is required a warning, here. Birds still die of starvation or are eaten by predators. Lilies will still dry up and wither from the scorching heat of drought. It stands to reason that Jesus' teaching here is not a guarantee that you will never be in need. Natural disaster, war, persecution, and many other things may threaten you on all sides, and may even be a means by which you will find yourself lacking the necessities of life. In those times, God's ways and providence are mysterious, but His way is still to provide for all of your needs. Therefore, do not worry. You are a son of the Father in heaven for the sake of His only-begotten Son; He will see fit to provide you everything that you need.

How does God provide for all of your needs, even when it seems His hand is withdrawn, and especially in those times when, mysteriously, it actually is? "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." What does this mean? It is an invitation by Jesus to go to the places where He is reigning with His gracious presence—where you receive His gifts of forgiveness and righteousness. To seek the kingdom of God—to seek the reign of Jesus—is to seek the Gospel, and it is only done by one who has received the Gospel.

Think about it. When you have received a good thing, you want more of it. That is how it goes with you and Jesus. Jesus gifts you with forgiveness, life, and salvation, and your New-man desire is to get more of it—to seek out where it is given.

Where does Jesus say He is for you? He promises His gracious, reigning presence for you where

the Gospel is proclaimed in its purity and the Sacraments are administered according to the Gospel, and this is a promise kept through natural disaster, war, and persecution as well as in times of peace and plenty, and everything in between. In fact, dear hearers, you are in his gracious, reigning presence right now. Here, in this place, Jesus is present for you, to give of Himself to you, as He gave Himself for you on the cross on Calvary.

Here, in this place, Jesus clothed you in raiment far greater than Solomon and feeds you with with richer fare than the birds.

Here, Jesus clothed you in the robes of righteousness as you were washed in a most salutary flood. As the water poured over you with the Word, you were made a son of God, whereat He placed that robe on you—made white in the blood of the Lamb—and sealed you to Himself, a dear child and heir of eternal life—think the prodigal son when he returned to his father. (cf. Luke 15:20-22)

Here, Jesus feeds you with real food and gives you to drink with real drink. (cf. John 6:55) The table here is spread with a fare prepared at Calvary, where His body was given over to death for your life and His blood shed for your propitiation. Here, in this place, you come to the rail and receive a piece of unleavened bread that is the body of Christ and a sip of wine that is His blood.

It is by these that you can take to heart the invitation not to worry. “Therefore I say to you, do not worry 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?” By faith you know that your life is precious and won for you, not by the temporal food or clothing that God gives you, but by the eternal robe of righteousness and food of life won for you by Jesus Christ and carried to you by the Holy Spirit.

It is a faith expressed in the actions of your brothers and sisters in the past, like Stephen, Valentine, and Lawrence, stoned to death, beheaded, and roasted over a fire respectively. But you see it also in more recent examples in the Levant, where Christians are being beheaded for not renouncing their faith. The threat of no food or clothing is quite real for them, yet they trust in the promise that Jesus has made to and for them—that their Father will clothe and feed them...and this a clothing and food that will never run out, and that no persecution is able to remove from them. (cf. Matthew 6:19-20; John 10:28-29)

It is a faith expressed in your singing of a Lutheran hymn, sung around Reformation.

The Word they still shall let remain / Nor any thanks have for it; / He's
by our side upon the plain / With His good gifts and Spirit. / And take
they our life, / Goods, fame, child and wife, / Let these all be gone, /
They yet have nothing won; / The Kingdom ours remaineth.

Persecutions will come. They will threaten your well-being—your ability to clothe yourself and feed yourself. They will threaten your security and freedom. They will threaten your life. Let these all be gone, for you still have the victory—they have nothing won. You have been placed into the kingdom which your New Man now seeks. You seek this kingdom—earnestly desire it—because here, you are clothed and fed...you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.