

Luke 12:22-34
Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
August 7, 2022

Matters of an inheritance can cause conflict. Wills may be challenged; family members stop speaking to each other. Such an issue prompted last Sunday's Gospel, the Parable of the Rich Fool. The problems result from greed and a focus that is too great on money. Today's Gospel follows as Jesus addresses our hearts and tells us

BE HEAVENLY-MINDED

- I. Trust God for life
- II. Seek God's kingdom
- III. Prioritize spiritual life

While we are heavenly-minded we trust God for life because earthly needs do exist. We cannot long survive without bodily sustenance. Even mission-minded spiritual leaders have noted that a person whose stomach is growling with hunger may not be able to hear your preaching of the gospel. The problems come when our focus is predominantly on earthly needs. There are challenges to our daily survival. We recognize that inflation makes daily necessities cost more and strains budgets. Worry takes over. Will we be able to make ends meet? Will I be able to provide for the needs of my family? Are we going to starve? We're told some senior citizens have to choose between medications and food.

Even in times of plenty, worries may distract us. Will I lose my job? Will I become disabled? Will I live longer than my savings? We may have fear of someone stealing what we have or taxes taking it away. As we look at life and its pitfalls we will never be satisfied.

God meets our earthly needs. Jesus counteracts our worried feelings with the words before us. "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear." Worry paralyzes activity and clouds our thinking to solve dilemmas. The Savior further stated the right perspective: "Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes." As Abraham, who was cited in the Second Lesson, and others mentioned in the omitted verses, we're only passing through our present dwelling place. This earth is temporary. So it is not worth getting all worked up about.

The big reason not to worry is because God provides. He promises to do so. He delivers on that promise as Jesus illustrated in the text. "Consider the ravens: they do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable are you than birds!" Ravens were among the creatures

declared unclean to eat for the people of Israel under Old Testament dietary law. I suppose it's because they are scavengers and thus have contact with dead things. Even those birds God cares for. Aren't you much more valuable than them? Of course: the Lord specially made you, endowed you with a soul and showed his love by sending his Son to save you. (More on that later.) The same is true of clothing. "Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these." Solomon was a king and wealthy so he could dress impressively, yet he appeared drab compared with flowers. They come in colorful array. We see some of it when we come to church and view the planting beds outside. Think of the scenes during the weeks of spring and summer. The progression of blooms is vibrant around us, continuing even into the fall, when also the leaves turn colors. God gave us such pleasing views despite their temporary nature. Once they had passed their prime flowering plants were used as fuel by the ancients.

Material matters are not worth worrying about. Worry adds nothing productive. "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" It causes side effects that harm health, not improve or lengthen life. It only makes the days seem longer. Worry does not supply needs. Taking action and doing work are better uses of our time, but they are still not the key.

"The pagan world runs after all such things." Unbelievers expend great efforts to get more because they think it's all up to themselves to make or break it. They don't know better. God says he shines his sun upon the evil and the good and sends rain to the righteous and the unrighteous. His blessings are not limited to believers. Because those who don't acknowledge God lack awareness of those truths, they will slave away, even cheat and steal to get more. The Lord set the cycles of nature in motion during his creation week. It does take work to utilize and benefit from them, but it's not all up to us. Look to God with trust. He knows your needs and supplies them.

Are you a worrier? Concern for the welfare of your family is proper and actions to meet their needs is important, but take them with contentment at the results of your labors and be confident that God will supply you with enough. Worry goes beyond care. It reveals a lack of trust. The solution is not to command. "Don't worry!"—that only leaves you with the worry that you might be worrying and thus offending God. The approach is law-oriented. Be heavenly-minded instead. Look to God and his care. See his performance. I once read a study about how little of what we worry about actually happens—I think it was 70% does not occur and another 20% deals with matters we have no control over, so only 10% matters. Trust God for life.

There is something to be actively pursuing, not material matters but seek God's kingdom. If we're going to seek it, we need to understand what it is. His kingdom is not a place that you can point to on a map, bounded by a mountain range on one side and a river or ocean on the other. It is unseen. Jesus once said it is "within you."

The word "kingdom" carries a verbal thought; it is an activity. It is God's rule in hearts by his Word. Believing makes you a part of the kingdom of God. We are talking about specific faith, not mere acknowledgement of some vague, generic supreme being. It is the God of the Bible, the one who reveals himself there. He is our Maker and Preserver and more. He is our Savior, who has rescued us from our sins of unbelief and worry, doubt and all the misbehavior that fills our lives. He promised and sent his Son, who took our place in living and dying. He showed total reliance on his Father and obedience to his will. He achieved righteousness and credited it to us. He took from us our load of sin and paid the price on the cross as he suffered the pains of hell that we deserved. The debt is paid in full. His work is complete.

He wants you to have what he brings. He carried out his mission for the world, for the entire human race. As God he was able to have that effect. That means you and I are included. All your sins are forgiven because of his great love for you.

Jesus wants you to know and believe that truth. He brought you the message in baptism, which was used by the Spirit to plant faith in your heart. The Word tells about the Savior to increase your faith or to plant it if you had not been brought to faith earlier. Seeking God's kingdom means staying in contact with the good news of Jesus and his work. Like plants need moisture and nutrients to live and produce, so does faith need to be fed to stay alive and grow.

The devil is constantly at work to create doubts in our minds. "Did Jesus really forgive my sins? Do I believe?" "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom," our Savior assures. It is his doing all the way—he has been pleased to give you the kingdom. He chose you in eternity, brought you the gospel and keeps you in faith as you continue to receive it. So keep hearing the Word, remembering Christ's work as you receive his Word and the sacraments. That's how to seek his kingdom.

III.

What our Lord is telling us is to prioritize spiritual life. It involves using the right purses. Ah, purses! Many of you know that Jan and I volunteer at Twice is Nice, the resale store that supports Lakeside Lutheran High School. I work primarily at the back door, where the donations are received and then dispersed to the various departments. That role makes clear to me that there is an abundance of goods in

our land. God has certainly kept his promise to provide for us. All types of goods are overflowing. One department handles purses. There are boxes and boxes of purses. A number of donations come after a loved one has died. One family recently brought purses from the mom. There were large garbage bags full, labeled 18 purses, 14 purses—must have been about seventy purses in all. When the Savior sent his disciples out on a preaching mission he told them not to take a bag of supplies. They would discover that they would be supported. Those purses contained only daily needs.

Again Jesus takes our thoughts higher, to treasures in heaven. Eternal life is awaiting us there. Fill yourself with that message. Earthly wealth does pass away. It can be lost now. If your retirement dollars are invested in the stock market, you know that this year. Everything of a material nature will pass away. God fills us with peace and joy that will never end. It is received by faith and nobody can rob you of it and it will not decay.

Jesus continued, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Pursue what has value. Spiritual matters are most important. The place for your heart is with the Lord.

When we prioritize our spiritual life there will be results in how we use our things now. Since we are not building a lasting treasure here and pinning our hopes on this earth, we can share what we have. "Sell your possessions and give to the poor," our Savior instructed. We will be helpful to others, especially those in need. We will perform acts of charity. God does not command selling everything we have or we would be in poverty ourselves and become the ones needing help. Having an abundance, and most people in America do, we can show love in our community and personal encounters. Our synod's Christian Aid and Relief arm reaches out to wider areas of need. Sometimes the criticism is heard, "Christians are so heavenly-minded that they are of no earthly good." That's not true, for we will be in the forefront of helping others.

Sharing the gospel meets the greatest need of an individual so we will be generous in our support of the work of the Lord in missions. It shows our spiritual priorities and brings lasting blessings to the recipients.

Being heavenly-minded is thus a blessing to yourself and those you reach. It keeps you from worry as you know God will take care of you, assures you that he has met the greatest need of your soul with forgiveness so you are at peace for life and eternity and motivated to be a blessing to others as you share both materially and spiritually. There is no need for arguing about an inheritance as you live and work in peace and joy. May God grant that blessing to you in Jesus!