

STOP WORRYING!
Sermon for the 9th Sunday after Pentecost, 2019
Luke 12:22-34

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel read before, Luke 12:22-34: ²² **Jesus said to His disciples: “Therefore, I tell you: Stop worrying about your lives, what you are to eat or about your bodies, what you are to wear! ²³ For life is a greater thing than food, and the body is a greater thing than clothing. ²⁴ Consider the ravens! They do not sow or reap. They have no storeroom or barn, and yet God feeds them. How much more valuable are you than the birds? ²⁵ Which of you by worrying can add an hour to his length of life? ²⁶ Therefore, if you cannot do even the smallest thing, why do you worry about the rest? ²⁷ Consider how the lilies grow! They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. ²⁸ If that is how God clothes the grass, which is in the field today and tomorrow is thrown into an oven, how much more will He clothe you, O you of little faith! ²⁹ You also, stop trying to get what you are to eat and what you are to drink and stop being anxious! ³⁰ For all the nations of the world search for these things, but your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ Rather, be eager to have His kingdom! These things will be given to you as well.**

³² **“Stop being afraid, little flock! For your Father has considered it good to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions and give to the poor! Make yourselves purses that do not wear out, a treasure that will never be used up, in heaven, where no thief comes near, and no moth destroys! ³⁴ For your heart will also be where your treasure is.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Immediately before our text today, Jesus had taught the parable of the wealthy fool to the crowds who had come out to listen to Him. Remember how that rich fool had pulled down his barns to build bigger ones because of a bumper harvest? In that parable Jesus warns about worshipping the *gifts* instead of worshipping the *Giver*. His teaching was a warning to the wealthy who are tempted to fall in love with the things *they have*. It is also a warning to the rest of us who are tempted to fall in love with the things *we want*.

Today, our passage begins with the words, **“Jesus said to His disciples.”** After Jesus had finished teaching the crowds, He apparently took His disciples aside for some additional teaching. It was not only the twelve disciples here, but also the seventy-two as well as the larger group of followers for whom God is Father and to whom the Father has given His kingdom. Because Jesus was now into His final journey to Jerusalem, where He would give His life for mankind, much of His teaching was focused on preparing His disciples for their future proclamation after He would ascend into heaven, since after His ascension, many of these same people would form the seed from which the Lord would grow His church.

A little earlier Jesus had told the crowd that *“a person’s life does not consist in how plentiful his possessions are,”* (Luke 12:15). Now, this morning, we hear Him telling the disciples that **“life is a greater thing than food, and the body is a greater thing than clothing.”** Although the words are different, the basic thought is the same. Life is not all about what we have. In the first case Jesus was warning those who relied and depended on earthly wealth because *they thought they had enough*. In the second case, Jesus was warning those who relied and depended on earthly wealth but were worried that *they did not have enough*. Whether you trust in your wealth because you think you have enough, or whether you worry that you don’t have enough, your faith is in the wrong thing... what you do or don’t have. Possessions can become a significant distraction not only for the disciples, but also for us.

The words from Jesus today teach us that worry is a form of idolatry. When we worry, we are saying one of two things about God. We are either saying that God is not powerful enough to help us, or that God is powerful, but doesn’t care - or maybe He even wants to hold us back. In any case, we are saying that we cannot rely on God and must therefore rely on ourselves and on our possessions, our ‘stuff.’ When we trust in ourselves above all things, we are saying that we are god. When we trust in our stuff above all things, we are saying that our stuff is god. Either way, we are committing idolatry, and not trusting in God above all things. In fact, we are not trusting in God *at all*, a breaking of the very First Commandment.

Worry is not only spiritually damaging, but it isn’t even helpful in this earthly world. Worry accomplishes nothing and can be physically harmful. Jesus said, **“²⁵ Which of you by worrying can add an hour to his length of life? ²⁶ Therefore, if you cannot do even the smallest thing, why do you worry about the rest?”** Even the modern medical community tells us that the stress of anxiety can cause a variety of disorders that has the potential to shorten our life.

It may seem strange, but humanity managed to worry even when things were perfect. In the Garden of Eden, Eve was worried. The seeds of worry were planted when Eve began to wonder about the forbidden fruit. “*Maybe,*” she thought, “*God was holding something back about the fruit’s benefits.*” In spite of the fact that she was queen of the entire universe and could look forward to an immortal life of perfect health and happiness, she was worried. Perhaps God was not allowing her to develop to her full potential. She trusted the word of a snake more than the Word of God.

Worry is one of the sins that Adam and Eve allowed into the world when they fell into sin. The corruption of sin that brought frustration, injury, illness, and death into this world also makes us worriers from birth. Worry is part of the package that comes with our original sin. “How am I going to manage payment of that bill?” “When is it going to rain?” “How are we going to meet the next church budget?” “How am I going to deal with this family problem?” And so on it goes.

What then can be done about this worry? Look to Jesus. Jesus said, “**Therefore, I tell you: Stop worrying about your lives, what you are to eat or about your bodies, what you are to wear!**”²³ **For life is a greater thing than food, and the body is a greater thing than clothing.**” At first, it may seem that Jesus is telling us to simply change our attitude. If we are not careful, we may take these words to mean that we should just buck up and get with the program. We should just adopt a happy attitude and all our worries will go away. If that were all that Jesus meant when He said these words, we would have every right to despair because in spite of our best efforts, we still worry. Thankfully, there is much more for us in these words.

Remember, Jesus was speaking to His disciples - the ones who believed in Him. Because of that He could be more personal with them. After all, Jesus had already taught them to think of Him as their brother so that His Father is also their Father. He had taught them to pray beginning with the words “*Our Father.*”¹ When Jesus taught the crowds, He spoke of the God who said, “*You fool, this very night your life will be demanded of you. Then who will get the things that you have prepared?*” (Luke 12:20). When Jesus taught His disciples, He said, “**Stop being afraid, little flock! For your Father has considered it good to give you the kingdom.**” Those who believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins have that relationship of a dear child to a dear father. In his Gospel John says, “*To all who received Him, who believe in His name, He gave the right to become the children of God,*” (John 1:12).

Jesus doesn’t just tell us that life is more than food. He gives us life. Life with Jesus is more than just the years that we spend here on this earth. By calling attention to the short life of the grass of the field, He reminds us that we inherited an immortal soul from our first father, Adam - a soul that was breathed into Him by the very breath of God. The end of our lives here on this earth is not our final destination. Our final destination is in eternity.

Jesus gently chides us for worrying about clothing by reminding us that the clothing He provides for even the simplest flowers like lilies is superior to the finest clothing that Solomon’s tailors could design. He says, “²⁷ **Consider how the lilies grow! They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these.**” Jesus is not just talking about flowers here. He is telling us that in eternity we too shall rise with newly transformed and immortal bodies - bodies that are more than clothing. God has provided a new set of clothes for us that far exceeds all other clothes. He has clothed us in the righteousness of Jesus Christ.²

This is the righteousness of Christ’s perfect, sinless life. As the prophet Isaiah once wrote, “*I rejoice greatly in the LORD. Let my soul shout with joy in my God! For He has clothed me with garments of salvation. He has wrapped me in a robe of righteousness, like a bridegroom who puts on a splendid head-dress, such as a priest wears, and like a bride who decorates herself with her jewels,*” (Isaiah 61:10).

We did not have any right to wear that righteous dress, but Jesus, the Christ, took the filthy rags of our worry and other sins to the cross. With His sacrificial suffering and death, He earned the right for us to wear His eternal righteousness. Now He gives us the right to be adopted as His brothers so that we can wear the glorious robes of His righteousness and call His Father our Father. God has clothing for us that is infinitely better than the clothing of **the grass, which is in the field today and tomorrow is thrown into an oven**.

We have the assurance that Jesus has earned all these gifts for us because He did not remain in the grave after He died for us, but rose from the dead and ascended to rule at the right hand of the Father. This resurrection assures us that the glorious robes of Christ’s righteousness now belong to us.

The Holy Spirit gives these robes to us through the Word of God as the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to write, “*faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ,*” (Romans 10:17). We can hear those words as they are read and preached, or as they come to us in the absolution. We can feel those words with the water of Baptism. We can taste those words as we receive Christ’s body and blood in and with the bread and wine. It is through these means that the

¹ Luke 11:2

² 2 Corinthians 5:21

Holy Spirit has chosen to create and nurture the miracle of faith, and it is the Holy Spirit's gift of faith that covers us with the robe of Christ's righteousness.

When we worry and the Holy Spirit reminds us that it is a sin, He will also remind us that we are baptised children of God. He will remind us that Jesus has redeemed us from sin, death, and the power of the devil with His holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. He will remind us that we wear the righteousness of Christ and not even the grass of the fields is dressed as gloriously. He will remind us that after that grass has long since been converted to smoke and ashes, we will wear those robes of Christ's righteousness in the eternity of His presence. After all, we have the promise of Jesus who says: **"Stop being afraid, little flock! For your Father has considered it good to give you the kingdom."**

We must continue seeking the treasure of the kingdom, all the while trusting that our heavenly Father will provide adequate earthly treasure as well to sustain us on our journey from earth to heaven. Even more precious, along the way while still on earth, His **little flock** will be graced with eternal heavenly treasures through Christ, the Shepherd who washes us in Baptism, feeds us with the new Passover Lamb - His body and blood in the Supper, and tends us with the guidance of His Word.

As we remember that the End is fast approaching, let us keep in mind that God's faithfulness far exceeds our needs, providing for us as He sees fit, and always look to Him and trust that He always gives us what we need. After all, our **"Father has considered it good to give (us) the kingdom."** A **"treasure that will never be used up... where no thief comes near, and no moth destroys!"**

To Him be all glory! Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Heavenly Father, we rejoice to remember Your constant love, and we join Your Church everywhere to praise Your glorious name. We thank You that Your Spirit has made us Your adopted children in Jesus Christ, so that we may truly know You as our Father, call on You confidently in prayer, and know that You will hear us.

We pray for all believers in the family of the Church. Preserve Your remnant of grace. Give Your flock shepherds whom Your Spirit teaches and leads, and who earnestly proclaim Your pure Word of life. Grant that they may lovingly feed Your sheep with Your Word, and strive to protect them from all error. Rescue Your Church from the dangerous lies of all false shepherds, so that Your children may be linked together in love, may stand firm in a common purpose and may work together to spread the Gospel.

Show Your glory and power to the nations, O God. Turn those in authority whose eyes are spiritually blind to Your light, and from the power of Satan to Christ, so that they may possess the forgiveness of sins and a place among the children of God. Look with favour on our country, that liberty, justice, and high morals may hold sway, and destroy all ungodliness and evil influences. Look with compassion upon the parched earth and send rain again.

Heavenly Father, let Your Spirit fill our homes. Let the word of Christ in all its richness live in the hearts of children, and enable all parents to be proper examples of Christian faith and life. Protect our families in every storm of life, and keep them from all evil.

Since You have sent Your Son into the world so that no one may die in His sins, keep us pure in a corrupt and sinful world, so that we may finally obtain the crown of life. Teach us to know better what You want for us, to stop worrying, and to let us yield a rich harvest of godly deeds, able to stand firm in the faith. Help us to put to death the desires of our sinful nature, and to live in the Spirit, as those who will one day enjoy all that You have promised.

Heavenly Father, the source of all holy desires, wise plans, and right actions, give Your peace to all, especially to those who are facing pain, sickness, mental agony, spiritual distress, or any other burden of body or soul. Assure them of Your love and mercy, that they may place themselves in Your care, and receive from You everything they need for their lasting good.

Loving Father, You have invited us to bring our requests before You with thanks. Therefore accept these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Amen.

The 9th Sunday after Pentecost

Genesis 15:1-6

¹ After this, the Word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram! I am your Shield and your very great Reward."

² Abram asked: "O Lord GOD, what will You give me? For I continue to be childless and the one who will become the heir of my household is Eliezer of Damascus."

³ Then Abram also said, "Look! You have given me no offspring and so a member of my household will be my heir."

⁴ Then the Word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but one who comes from your own body will be your heir."

⁵ He took Abram outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can count them!"

He also told him, "Your offspring will be like them!"

⁶ Abram believed the LORD, and He credited it to him as righteousness.

Hebrews 11:1-16

¹ Faith is the confident assurance of the things we hope for, the conviction about things that are not seen. ² For by it the men of long ago were well attested. ³ By faith we understand that the universe has been created by the Word of God, so that what is seen has not been made from things that are visible.

⁴ By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was approved as a righteous man, when God approved of his offerings and by faith he is still speaking, although he has died.

⁵ By faith Enoch was taken away so that he would not see death and "he was not found, because God had taken him." For, before he was taken away, he had this testimony, that he had pleased God. ⁶ Without faith it is impossible to please God. For he who comes to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly search for Him.

⁷ By faith when God had warned Noah about the things that were not yet seen, he respected God and built an ark to save his family. By this faith he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes through faith.

⁸ By faith, when Abraham was called to go away to a place that he would receive as an inheritance, he obeyed and went, although he did not know where he was going.

⁹ By faith he lived as a stranger in the Promised Land, as though it belonged to someone else. He lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose Architect and Maker is God.

¹¹ By faith Sarah herself also received the ability to conceive a child, even though she was barren and was past the age, because she considered Him faithful who had made the promise. ¹² Therefore, descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the

sand on the seashore came from this one man, although he had been as good as dead.

¹³ All these people died in faith. They did not receive what had been promised but saw them from far away and welcomed them. They also confessed that they were strangers and sojourners on the earth. ¹⁴ For those who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵ Indeed, if they were thinking of the country that they had left, they would have had an opportunity to return. ¹⁶ Instead, they were longing for a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God. For He has prepared a city for them.

Luke 12:22-34

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