

“Enough-ness”
Matthew 6:25-34
The Last Sunday after Pentecost
November 24, 2024
Rev. Anita Peebles, Seattle First Baptist Church

Matthew 6:25-34

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For it is the gentiles who seek all these things, and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. “So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.”

This is a funny time of year. Stuck between All Saints’ Day and a controversial election and a holiday that arguably glorifies a deeply whitewashed history of colonization and the season in which we anticipate the birth of the Christ child into our world and the commercialization of Christianity’s holiest day—we have this Sunday, and we have this text that tells us “Do not worry.”

As people living in this world, it would be understandable if we scoff and roll our eyes and say, “Yeah, right!” There’s plenty to worry about! And as someone who lives with high anxiety, I hardly find it helpful to be told not to worry, as if I’ve never thought of THAT before.

But before I get ahead of myself in naming all the (valid) things we could possibly worry about, let’s pause. The scripture text starts with “therefore.”

The words of Jesus our lectionary assigned for today don’t come out of nowhere, they are directly related to whatever was just said.

And what was that?

Matthew 6:24 offers this challenge: “You cannot serve both God and Mammon.”

You cannot serve both God and wealth. You have to make a choice.

So then, knowing a choice must be made, Jesus is telling his listeners what they must do...if they have chosen to serve God instead of wealth, which, in our time, is all too easy to do.

Richard Beaton writes in a commentary,

“Society has changed a great deal since the time of Jesus. Definitions of poverty, wealth, and the good life are much different today than they were then. For example, we are constantly being bombarded with images and messages from advertisers, media, and sometimes even friends and family, that encourage us to consume. Further, such messages can make us feel unhappy with what we have in the hope that we will buy and consume more. The other side of this equation includes the harsh reality of economic failure. Media reports are replete with sad stories of homes being foreclosed upon, and financial tragedy striking both individuals and businesses. The heart-rending effects of poverty and homelessness still affect our society. We have constructed a world economy that is dependent upon the American consumer to keep it afloat. As a result, we live with conflicting messages and concerns that distract us and divide our loyalties. We seek security and stability and are appropriately worried about our future.”¹

And against this backdrop for all of us living in US American society, we hear these words: “Do not worry...seek first the kingdom of God and God’s righteousness and all these things will be given to you.” You will be provided for, Jesus promises. Just as God provides for the lilies and the birds, God will take care of you. God’s got you.

Essentially, the decision to serve God or to serve wealth comes down to trust. Steven P. Eason says in one commentary, “Jesus’ word is not overly complicated, but it is difficult to grasp.”

Because trust is complicated. It’s hard. It requires vulnerability, that we bare some of ourselves, that we open our hearts to allow someone else the power to affect us. What we place our trust in says a lot about what we value and who and how we try to be in this world.

Theologian Arthur C. McGill wrote, “whether people serve themselves or serve others is not in their power to choose. This is decided wholly in terms of the kind of world in which they think they live, in terms of the kind of power that they see ruling the roost. In New Testament terms they live or die according to the king that holds them and the kingdom to which they belong.”²

The question before us today is this: Are we going to center our lives on acquiring more-more-more to keep the fear of scarcity at bay? Or will we trust, can we trust, are we trusting now in the abundance of God?

And if we can’t answer that with a resounding “yes!” at this very moment: congratulations, you’re human.

¹ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/eighth-sunday-after-epiphany/commentary-on-matthew-624-34-2>

² Feasting on the Word, Year A, vol 3.

But wait, don't despair, Jesus has wisdom for us on that too: "consider the birds of the air," "look at the lilies of the field."

These are not trite or glib phrases meant to gloss over the hardship of living: Jesus knew enough about that, born a brown-skinned, Palestinian Jew in an out-of-the-way village in an empire-occupied territory. Jesus, who for a time made a living as a carpenter, who never owned property, who the scriptures tell us sometimes "had no place to lay his head." Jesus, who was abandoned by his friends and sentenced to a criminal's humiliating death—Jesus knew plenty about hardship. You won't catch him uttering thoughtless platitudes.

Jesus' references to the birds and the lilies is a call to a deep noticing. In the original Greek of Matthew's gospel, there is a strong emphasis on the verbs that are translated "look" and "consider"...it's not just give a passing glance and an off-the-top-of-your-head thought. Jesus calls his hearers then, and us hearing him now, to deeply observe nature and see what miraculous care and order God has infused into all of life. He's saying to us: really ponder, spend some time in deep thought about this Creation of which you are a part.

Homiletician Thomas G. Long writes, "if we look long enough and hard enough at the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, suddenly there will break into our imagination a slice of that alternative reality, a world not of tooth and claw but a world of providential care, a world in which the One who created it delights in tending the garden and nourishing the creature. What if we live in that world? What if we live, not in a world where we have been abandoned to our own devices, but in a world of divine abundance...a world not ruled by acquisitiveness and insecurity, but a world in which God gifts gift after gift after gift?"

So friends, what if? What if we live in that world of divine gift, of abundance, of enough-ness?

That has the potential to change us.

That has the potential to change everything.

Life on this planet is interdependent, so much so that the very air we breathe is supported by the trees that we plant. The water that makes up most of our bodies and that we cannot live without has been recycled over billions of years, giving life to dinosaurs and ferns and butterflies and salamanders and mosses before reaching us. The glory of connection is wound in and through our neurons in a miraculous mirror of the mycelium network of fungi decomposers beneath the soil. Cats purr at a decibel level that is related to healing trauma. Human hearts keep time together when we sing.

How could one see any of this and not see abundance? How could one respond to any of this with anything less than gratitude?

Catherine of Siena, writing in God's voice, said, "I could easily have created [humanity] possessed of all that they should need both for body and soul, but I wish that one should have need of the other, and that they should be my ministers to administer the graces and gifts that they have received from me. Whether [one] will or no, [one] cannot help making an act of love."

Friends, it is Love that has gotten us safe thus far. It is Love that created the interweaving of all Creation, Love that has provided for each living being on this planet, Love that inspires us to share with one another and learn from one another and sustain one another, Love that keeps trying to get our attention when we mess up. It is Love that believes in us and calls us to rest in the assurance of abundant grace.

Stephen B. Boyd writes,

“The ordering of God in creation—the righteousness of God—and the provision of what we and others need for our flourishing are two sides of the same coin. Jesus tells his followers to ‘strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well’ (v 33). They will. That is simply the nature of the universe that God has created. To believe that our deepest interests conflict with those of others is to misunderstand the nature of reality and the generosity at the heart of it. It is a failure to grasp the way the universe works. Fear and the hoarding it produces stop the flow, or great exchange, by which the universe functions and they lead to death. Love and the self-giving it motivates contribute to the reciprocity by which life is sustained. The choice is simple—life or death. The decision to follow the way of life, however, is frightening. We have all known those who seem motivated more by fear than by love, by hoarding than by generosity. We have known those whose reflex is to exploit our vulnerability and that of others, rather than respond to meet it with compassion and self-giving. In the face of such a one, or in the face of institutions that seem bent on exploitation, choosing life requires a courage born of faith, hope, and love.”

We’ve been given a choice: to live for God or Mammon? We know the right way we are supposed to choose, even if it is harder to commit to than we’d like to admit.

But I believe we can choose right. “Seattle First Baptist is a church community that seeks to follow the way of Jesus Christ, to be a people of God and to love and care for our neighbors.”

Here, we have faith, we have a vision for the future that is inclusive and just and protects the dignity of all people, we know that another world is possible, a world where children do not go to bed hungry and elders have the care and community they need and where munitions factories are no longer needed. We have hope, in each other, in our stories, in our children, in the relentless resilience of people who have resisted dangerous political regimes many times, in the bulbs that send little green shoots up through the soil each spring. And we have love: for ourselves, for each other, for our families and friends and neighbors, for people we don’t know but who have just as much a right to health and happiness as we do. We have love that shows up in phone calls and kind words and hands held and public witness and grieving together and watching each other grow into our full, true selves.

Beloveds, we have what it takes to serve the Holy with everything we have. And we have so very much already. There is enough faith, enough hope, enough love here in this place to shift our small part of the world in a way that has ripple effects far beyond what we can imagine.

And so in this season of thanksgiving, let us follow the prompt of the wise Eckhart Tolle:
“Acknowledging the good that you already have in your life is the foundation for all abundance.”
There is so much good here, and we have so much good to share.

Friends, hear the good news: there’s enough love to go around. You are enough, just as you are.
You are not alone, we live in a marvelous interconnected world. We need each other. And we
have each other. Praise God. Amen.