

Sixteenth Sunday of Pentecost

September 4, 2005

Matthew 6:24-34

Sermon by Pastor Paul Janke

Trust Your Heavenly Father and Leave Your Worries Behind

1. Four Reasons to Leave Your Worries Behind
2. Four Reasons to Trust Your Heavenly Father

^{NIV} Matthew 6:24 "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.²⁵ "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?²⁷ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?²⁸ "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?³¹ So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus,

Last week was quite a week, wasn't it? Hurricane Katrina barreled into the Gulf Coast, oil prices passed \$70 a barrel, some 800 people were trampled in a panic on a bridge in Baghdad, Modesto retained its title as the car-theft capital of the country, and real estate watchers speculated that the California housing bubble is beginning to deflate, if not burst. Add those things to the usual mix of personal and family

issues that we are dealing with just now and you've got more than enough to worry about.

The phenomenon of the anxious and worried heart is hardly a modern development. In the section of the Sermon on the Mount that we're looking at today, Jesus devotes ten verses of his sermon to the subject of worry and uses a form of the word "worry" six times.

The word for worry that Jesus uses can be used in a good sense and then it's usually translated "concern." Paul uses the word in one of his letters to speak of a pastor's concern for his people and of the concern that Christians have for each other's welfare. But the word is also used at times in a negative sense to indicate an undue concern, that is, a feeling of anxiety or worry. Paul uses the word in this sense when he writes to the Philippians and urges them not to be anxious about anything. And it's the word Jesus used to characterize Martha as she anxiously raced around the house trying to prepare for Jesus' visit, all the while resenting that her sister, Mary, wasn't doing more to help her.

Whether it's Martha two thousand years ago or you and me today, Jesus speaks words that worriers need to hear. The worrying way of life isn't much fun for us and it isn't pleasing to God. That's why Jesus instructs us this morning: **Trust Your Heavenly Father and Leave Your Worries Behind.** To that end he gives us 1) four reasons to leave our worries behind, and 2) four reasons to trust our heavenly Father.

1. Four reasons to leave our worries behind

Let's begin with the four reasons to leave our worries behind. The first reason to leave our worries behind is that worry is an indication that our faith is weak. Jesus says in verse 30: *"If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?"* Jesus has just observed that even the great King Solomon dressed in his most expensive robe couldn't match the glory of a field of wildflowers. Now if God clothes the grass of the field so beautifully, won't he also see to it that we have the clothes we need? To worry about what we'll wear is to behave like the disciples did in the boat on the Sea of Galilee. Despite the fact that Jesus was with them when the storm came up—that he was in fact peacefully asleep on a cushion in the stern of the boat—they worried that they were going to drown. When

Jesus woke up, he asked them, "**You of little faith, why are you so afraid?**" (Matt. 8:26) Worrying is not something to be encouraged or defended; it's something to repent of. Faith trusts; it doesn't worry.

There's a second reason to leave our worries behind. We find it in verse 27, where Jesus asks, "*Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?*" This is as good a reason as any to stop our worrying: worrying doesn't accomplish anything. At least it doesn't accomplish anything constructive. Worrying might make our heads pound or our hearts palpitate, it might elevate our blood pressure or give us ulcers, but no one ever accomplished anything positive merely by worrying about a situation. Something as completely futile as worry deserves to be left behind.

Not only is worrying futile, it's also unnecessary. When we find ourselves worrying about the future, Jesus says we ought to pause and take a look at the birds. (verse 26) "*Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.*" Birds don't stress about the future. They don't make any provision for the future at all. They sing. They soar. They tend their young. But they don't worry about what lies ahead. They live in the here and now and let tomorrow take care of itself, just like Jesus wants us to do. We are to do what God's got for us to do today and not fret about the future. God's got the future in hand, so there's no need to worry about it. I think most of us could write a fairly lengthy list of the things we once worried about that turned out to be things it wasn't necessary to worry about. So often we waste time and mental energy with our worrying.

A fourth reason to leave our worries behind is that worry is distracting. While we're busy worrying about what we'll eat and drink and wear, the great mission that God has given each one of us, the mission of seeking his kingdom and his righteousness, goes lacking. Isn't it also true that we often worry about the wrong things? Do you find yourself stressing more over having a clean house than over having a pure heart? Do you find that you're more worried about your earthly bank account than about storing up treasure in heaven? Too often we're more worried about providing material benefits for our children than we are about providing them with the eternal blessings that come through God's Word.

So worry needs to get the boot. It's nothing more than an indication that we lack of faith. It's futile and unnecessary and distracting. Nothing good comes from it. But, you might say, "Pastor you picked

the wrong week to preach against worry. Hurricanes are worrisome, especially Category 5 hurricanes. So is the prospect of terrorist attacks or an economic collapse. Any sane person would be worried." Don't misunderstand. I'm not promoting the kind of "Don't worry, be happy" philosophy that you heard in the Bobby McFerrin song of a few years back. That song could be understood to encourage a kind of reckless freedom from worry. If the rent is late, so what? Let the landlord litigate. There's an appropriate level of concern that people facing a powerful hurricane ought to have. They ought to board up their windows and stock up on batteries and water. Or maybe they ought to leave altogether and get out of the way of the hurricane. But when we've done all we can do, then, rather than worrying, Jesus instructs us to trust God. **"Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you,"** it says in Psalm 55. **"He will never let the righteous fall."**

Maybe you wondered when you heard today's Gospel lesson why verse 24 of Matthew 6 was included in this reading. That's where Jesus says, *"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and despise the love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Money."* It's not just that God doesn't want any rivals. For those idolaters who serve the god called Money ("Mammon" in the KJV), worry goes with the territory. "Mammon" was actually the name of the Syrian god of material possessions. And you can imagine that if this so-called god didn't bless you as you hoped and begged, worry was the natural result. It is different with our heavenly Father. The one who has vowed never to let the righteous fall has eradicated our reasons for worrying.

2. Four reasons for trusting our heavenly Father

Before we look at the reasons for trusting our heavenly Father, I'd like to have you take a look at the way Jesus twice refers to our God here. He calls him "(y)our heavenly Father." Earlier in this chapter, Jesus taught us to begin our prayers by saying, "Our Father in heaven..." That means of addressing the almighty God is a great privilege that Jesus gave us when he covered us with his righteousness in Holy Baptism. We are God's children through faith in Jesus. As many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus have been clothed with Christ Jesus and his righteousness. Now as God's holy children, cleansed from sin, we can confidently call God our Father and bring him our needs. Just hearing Jesus refer to God as our heavenly Father infuses us with confidence. Jesus said, **"If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will**

your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?" (Luke 11:12)

Rather than being wracked by worries, God's children can look to the future confidently. The first reason for that is in verse 26, where Jesus asks, "**Are you not much more valuable than (birds)?"** The Bible frequently notes the great worth that we believers have in the sight of God. We are the very crown of God's creation. God made us and he sustains us. More than that, God spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all. He redeemed us at a staggering cost from sin and death and Satan. No price was too high for him to pay so that he could make us his own. And there's still more: The Holy Spirit has sanctified us body and soul through baptism. The Holy Spirit living in us is God's seal of ownership on us. It's not that we deserved it—it's all by grace. But God regards you and me as very precious in his sight.

There's a second reason for trusting God in verse 32, where Jesus says, "**Your heavenly Father knows that you need them,**" that is, that we need food and drink and clothing. Jesus knows our needs *better* than we know them ourselves and he also knows them *before* we know them ourselves. God is never out of the loop on what it is that we need. He's not oblivious to our plight. The Bible says, "**He who watches over Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps.**" Our heavenly Father says through the prophet Isaiah, "**Before they call, I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.**" (Is. 65:24)

But it's one thing to know our needs; it's still another to be able to supply what we need. I know perfectly well what the people in the stricken areas of the Gulf Coast need: they need rescuing, they need food and water and medical attention. They need homes to replace the ones that have been ruined. But I, even if I gave every minute of the rest of my life and every cent I have, could not supply everything those people need. God can. He can use people like us working together to supply those needs. This is the God who promises that "*...all these things will be given to you as well.*" He's a faithful God who always does what he's promised. The eyes of all look to him and gives them their food. He opens his hand and supplies the needs of every living thing. King David said, "**I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging for bread.**" (Ps. 37:25) Because our God is compassionate and faithful, because he uses his limitless power in the interests of those he loves, King David says in another place, "**Let the**

righteous rejoice in the LORD and take refuge in him.” (Ps. 64: 10)

The final reason to trust our heavenly Father comes in that familiar verse 33: *“Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.”* In the media they refer to people like us as “consumers.” I’m not sure I like that description. Oh, sure, I consume food and drink. I buy clothes and consumer electronics and durable goods like appliances and cars. But you and I are more than just stomachs that need filling and bodies that need clothing. We have souls. By the sacrifice of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit we’ve been restored to the image of God. And God has given us this high and important mission of seeking his kingdom and his righteousness. His kingdom comes to us when the Holy Spirit leads us to believe in Jesus. His righteousness comes to us by faith. That’s our primary quest as believers—it’s not food and drink and clothes and all the other “stuff,” but righteousness and joy and peace through Jesus Christ. St. Augustine said, “You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.” Only the soul that trusts in Jesus can know real rest and peace.

“Stop worrying!” It’s easy to say that but, as any worrier can attest, it’s hard to stop. That’s why Jesus here in his Sermon on the Mount says far more than, “Don’t worry; be happy!” He gives us numerous reasons for leaving our worries behind and, even better, gives us multiple reasons for trusting our heavenly Father. As our faith grows, our worries will shrink. Amen.