

Your Problem Is not Worry

The Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity

September 17, 2023

Matthew 6:24–34

Jesus says, “Do not worry.” That’s pretty clear. It’s straightforward. So, don’t worry. It’s not good that you worry and you shouldn’t worry. But your problem is not worry. If you don’t worry then obviously your problem is not worry. If you do worry that is a problem. Jesus tells you not to worry. But it’s not your main problem.

Are you ready for this? Your true problem is idolatry. Your problem is the First Commandment, “You shall have no other gods.” You do. You have other gods. Worry is not your main problem but a manifestation of your main problem. Even if you don’t worry you still have a problem. And that is idolatry. It is the First Commandment. You look to other things for your fulfillment or your help. You put your trust in the things of this world and this life instead of trusting only in God.

That is what Jesus is getting at here. If it were a simple matter of stopping worrying, well, that would be a simple enough matter. There are many things you can do to stop worrying. Praying of course should be the first thing. Even just thinking about other things or putting yourself to work in something unrelated to what you’re worrying about can do wonders. There are many things you can do to stop worrying. But that’s not what Jesus is really getting at here.

Look at how He speaks about our problem. He is showing us that we are children of our Heavenly Father. We are not of this world. We are in this world. We need to live in this world. But this is not ultimately where we’re meant to be. We will die. We will not be here at some point. All that we have we at some point will no longer have. We are meant for something more, something greater!

So why are we spending so much time and energy on the things of this world as if that will bring us the peace and fulfillment we need? The unbelieving world thinks this way. We worry about not having enough. We are too consumed with making sure we have enough. Jesus says that non-Christians are the ones who spend their time seeking after the things of this world. But we are not the unbelieving world! We are Christians! God is our Father and we are His dear children.

Jesus says that our Father in heaven knows what we need to live. He already knows. We act as if it is up to us. We turn to the things of this world to make sure we have enough. In the verses leading up to our Gospel reading Jesus says, “Don’t store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don’t break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Everything you invest in—all your time, your thoughts, your money, your possessions—that is where your heart will be. If you are ensuring your temporal welfare by making sure you have enough then your heart is bound up in yourself. Your problem is idolatry and the First Commandment is not guiding your life.

Or think of it this way. How were things before the fall into sin? God created everything and everything was good, perfect. God created human beings as the crown of His creation, giving everything else under our dominion. And what did God give Adam to do in the Garden of Eden? He put him to work. Adam was to be the caretaker of everything. He didn’t need to worry about anything. He didn’t have to wonder if he wouldn’t have enough to eat. God provided for him. Everything was at his disposal.

But Adam fell into sin. He stopped trusting in God alone. He looked to other things for his well-being. We have all joined him in sin and we no longer have everything we need. But we sure act like we will if we put all our energy and efforts into making it happen. That is where our heart is. It is far from God. Because of the fall into sin and our own sin life in this world is no longer where we belong. We no longer have everything we need in this life and not everything is perfect, it is not as it should be.

But what Jesus is getting at is that we do in fact have everything we need. We do because we have things that cannot be obtained by our own efforts or by all the money in the world. The treasure God already has for us is in heaven. Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. Jesus speaks of how to do this: “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” Do you do that? In all things, are you seeking what He has already obtained for you, an eternal kingdom? Are you putting your efforts and energy into living according to the righteousness of God?

This is not just spiritually-minded exhortation of our Lord which has no bearing in day to day life. Our Lord Jesus Christ is in fact eminently practical. This is how He tells us how to live: “Do not worry about tomorrow, tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” These words of Christ are of immense comfort and wisdom. Why are you worrying about tomorrow when God has given you things to do today? You have many responsibilities and tasks to do, today. There are all kinds of people in your life who need you to serve them as you carry out those tasks and responsibilities. God has placed these people in your life today for you to help them and be there for them. Why are you spending your time worrying about tomorrow when God has already given you enough to do today?

You are children of the Heavenly Father. See your life this way, not the way of the world. This is how the apostles saw the words of Christ. They are simply what Christ has given us to do in this life, because we are here for a time. In the Epistle reading Paul gives a number of exhortations. If you spent even a fraction of time pouring your energy into doing these things you’d have no time to worry! You would wonder why you were worrying in the first place! Yes, you have problems and you struggle and sometimes you do wonder how you will make it!

Seek first the kingdom of God. His kingdom is eternal. Seek His righteousness. You can never gain it by doing everything you can to preserve your life. He has already given you more than you could ever imagine and certainly more than you could ever bring about through your efforts. In another of his letters the apostle Paul said, “If God has not spared His own Son, how will He not also give us everything else?” Christ spent His time and energy in loving and serving others, even pouring out His life in suffering for all our sin on the cross. God has given you His Son, how will He not also give you everything else? Or, in the words of our Lord Himself: “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be provided for you as well.” Amen.

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