

The Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity

8 September, Anno Domini 2024

St. Matthew 6:24-34

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Saints of God,

Who among us isn't guilty of feverish handwringing about provisions for the future? Prepping is now an entire industry preying on our idolatry. Politicians and talking heads are constantly issuing dire warnings about Social Security and the markets to justify their own grasping for power and control over you. Groceries, gas, and everything else are more expensive every time you go ten around. The debt of our nation has reached such a staggering number that our children and grandchildren will be slaves to repaying our inability to control our spending. And to justify our worry about it, we tell ourselves we are just trying to be responsible, good stewards.

But worrying about the future, scrimping and hoarding away every penny so that we can stop working as soon as we possibly can is precisely NOT being a good steward. It is certainly not Christian stewardship. God isn't buying it. He sees through the posturing right down to the unbelief and idolatry that lie at the heart of the problem. And there isn't a one of us today who shouldn't be hanging our heads in utter shame as Jesus speaks. We pray for today's bread only to covet after tomorrow's and next year's.

Money can't help you. Money or the things you buy with it care nothing for you. And yet it is utterly astounding how much we worry about it and fear, particularly, its absence. "What will we do if we don't have money?" "If only the government, the schools, our church or our family had more money, everything would be

better.” We will slave away at ridiculous times and for a ridiculous amount of hours just so we can have more of it and then, maybe, just maybe, we’ll rest easy. Our families will not see us, we will forego prayer and study of the Word of God, even the Holy Sacraments all so that we can get more mammon and fill our barns under the guise of “We just don’t have a choice.”

Luther writes in the Large Catechism under the First Commandment “A god means that from which we are to expect all good and in which we are to take refuge in all distress.” (LC, Prt 1, 2) The question boils down to “Where is your heart?” What are you afraid of - poverty, not having what you think you need or even just want? Not being able to do the fun and lavish things you want? Having to make sacrifices and do without? Being uncomfortable? Will you risk your child’s faith so that they can get an expensive piece of paper that falsely promises them a higher-paying job? In whom or in what do you trust to care for you and provide for you and protect you? What will help you in your time of need?

Or is your chief concern your and your family’s salvation, your safe passage through this valley of the shadow of death - strewn as it is with an endless train of temptations leading to death - and a peaceful death, confident in Christ Jesus? What of the things of this earth can bring you that?

There is only one true God - Father, +Son, and Holy Spirit. He alone created you. He gave you your body and soul, your eyes and ears, your reason and all your senses. And here’s the really beautiful thing: He still, every day, preserves them, you, all of creation. Luther encouraged us to pray the words of Psalm 145 before we sit down to our meals: “The eyes of all look to You, O Lord, and You satisfy the desires of every living thing.” (Pslm 145:15-16) And this is true. Not even the most insignificant sparrow or flower of the field (even dandelions) are not known and cared for and provided for by God. And what do they do? Nothing. They certainly don’t worry about the future. They go about today, thinking nothing about tomorrow.

And here we are, the recipients of the Holy Spirit, those who are made in God's very own image, those for whom God the Father willingly nailed His Son to the cross to make payment for our sins, and what are we busy doing - running around, chasing after worldly goods and pleasures, sweating over what will happen tomorrow when we don't even know if there will be a tomorrow, hoarding the good gifts of God against the possibility that God won't provide for tomorrow in the same way that He has since the first day of our creation. We vainly seek after comfort and ease as though we have a right not to suffer, not to do without. We imagine that we should be entitled to new things and nice things because we have worked hard and deserve it. We take what has been entrusted to our stewardship and we use it selfishly to fill our lives with empty and fleeting joys. We imagine that all that has been given to us - our time, our wisdom, our talents, our money - is simply ours to use however we so choose and no one can say anything about it. "That's between me and...me."

Repent. God is not pleased with those who abuse His gifts, who do not graciously and faithfully enrich others as He has enriched us. He will not leave unpunished those who withhold mercy because the cost would be too high. He will not be fooled when we rob from Him by keeping our first fruits and thus our hearts from Him like our forefathers in the wilderness who tried to keep the Mann and the quail overnight because they doubted God's promise to provide. All that we have belongs to God who made the heavens and the earth, including our very existence. He is Father, that is, He is source. We are delusional to imagine otherwise. What will you do if it is all taken away in a moment? And don't believe for a second that it couldn't happen. Only look across history and see how men and entire empires have crumbled over night. Economies collapse. Accidents turn the strongest men into quadriplegics who can't feed or change themselves. Like the lilies of the field one day we are here and the next day we are not and all our plans are brought to nothing.

But what are these things - health, comfort, wealth, family, job? They are nothing. They are passing shadows like all created things. They didn't stretch out the heavens and raise the mountains out of the sea. They didn't wondrously knit you together in your mother's womb. They don't hold your well-being their hands. You cannot trust in them to preserve either your earthly life from physical death or your soul from judgment. "They yet have nothing won." God alone, through the precious Means of Grace, can ferry you safely to eternal life.

Beloved, you are the Baptized children of God. Your Father is the one who, in the beginning, spoke all things into existence from nothing. Your Father rules over the nations, accomplishing His good and gracious will for you, regardless of what sinful men and their demonic idols would seek to do to you. Your Father clothes the grass that you shred with your lawn mower with unparalleled beauty that no fashion designer could ever hope to replicate. Your Father knows the days of every sparrow that falls and every ant that passes over the sidewalk. He cares for them, giving to every beast its food and the young ravens when they cry. He doesn't sit idly by while creation spins on aimlessly toward destruction. And if He lavishes so much care on things that are of such little consequence, how much more will He care for you, the ones for whom He nailed His Son to the cross?

Yes, you have needs, but your needs are never greater than the One who laid them upon you, who created you with those needs so that you might always be mindful that you, above all, need Him. And what do you need that you haven't been given in Christ? Your death has been taken from you. You have the promise of the resurrection to eternal life and the complete and permanent restoration of your body. You have been clothed in the eternal and perfect righteousness of Christ. Why are you worried about clothing? You feast on the true Body and Blood of your Savior. Why do you worry about what you will eat and drink? You have the Holy Spirit who brings the peace that passes all human understanding. Nothing, not a single good thing, has been withheld from you and whatever you need, that

too will be given at the proper time.

Dear Christian, this world is not your home. Your treasures are not here. All that is earthly is passing away. Don't try to hang on to it. Don't try to pile it up around yourself. Don't set your heart on it or worry when you don't have it. God doesn't need any of it to take care of you. Whatever little bit you have is more than enough because God is your Father who loves you, who will spare nothing that you need. What is the best stewardship of that which has been given to you - lavish it upon others; enrich others and make friends for yourselves by means of the unrighteous mammon; set aside your first fruits so that the Word of God, which alone is able to give life, is never taken away or silenced. Let your chief concern always be to fill your hearts and minds with what never perishes or fades away and which alone is able to give you a clean conscience, a conscience at rest in God's presence - the life-giving Word which endures forever.

May God grant to us all hearts that long only for the kingdom of God and the righteousness which He freely and abundantly bestows in Word and Sacrament, hearts that overflow with the same mercy and abundance toward our neighbor because are not worried about what we will eat or what we will drink or what we will wear.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.