

Valued By God
Second in a Series / Our Life Together in Christ
August 7 and 8, 2022

Luke 12:22-24 - And he said to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds.

Dear Friends in Christ,

There are worriers, and then there are worriers on steroids. A man named David was one of those on steroids. He was extremely anxious about all aspects of life, and, quite frankly, it was ruining his life. He went to see a psychiatrist, who recommended that he hire somebody to worry on his behalf. A professional worrier. Which is what he did. A few months later, a friend of David’s noticed how life was going so much better. He asked what happened. David replied that he had hired a professional worrier. His friend asked how much he was paying. He answered, \$3000 a month.

“How can you afford to pay \$3000 a month? “I don’t know. That’s his problem.”

In today’s text, Jesus would invite us to quit worrying and to do so not by hiring someone to do our worrying for us, but rather by fixing our eyes again and again on the One Who has taken all of our worries and our burdens and our failures and our flaws to the cross. To see again and again that the God Who spared not His only begotten Son for us surely will graciously provide all that we need in all the seasons of life. To believe as Abraham and Sarah and Abel and Enoch believed - that God can be trusted even when and especially when it seems as though He is hiding His face from us.

Last week we began a series of sermons under the overall theme, “Our Life Together in Christ.” We noted that there were at least approaches to living life. You can live apart from Christ, which is to be a fool, according to Scripture. You can follow Christ at a distance, which is to forfeit so much of the peace and the strength He is wanting to give. Or you can follow Him closely. Last week we explored two temptations the Evil One likes to throw our way, with regard to worldly wealth. The temptation to be greedy instead of grateful for

blessings received. And secondly the temptation to store up our earthly treasures instead of being rich towards God.

Last Sunday's sermon explored what it means to be *Rich towards God*. Next Sunday, we will focus on being *Divided at the Cross*. The Sunday after that - *Struggling Through the Empty Door*. And the Sunday after that, *"Invited to Come Up Higher"*.

Today we would be still and we would be calm and we would be confident that God is God, even when the storms of life are swirling, even when people around us are disappointing, even when loved ones are stumbling. We would explore what it looks and feels like when our Christian faith rises up inside of us and crowds out those distractions and those anxieties that keep on knocking at the doors of our minds and souls.

To be valued by God is to have faith that He is with us and He is for us. Today we explore two sides of the coin with regard to Christian faith. Its passive side and its active side. On the one hand, faith sits still and receives. And on the other hand, faith stands up and pursues.

To be valued by God is to have a faith sits still and receives.

Assignment #1 each day for the people of faith is to be still and receive gifts of grace God is so very eager to give. **"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."** How hard is it, dear friends, to receive and enjoy a gift? Not hard at all. The very nature of Divine Service is that we sit still, and as we listen to the appointed lessons and message of the day, the divine is serving mere humans with gifts of the kingdom. The rhythm of worship is that God serves and we are served. He gives, and we receive. Blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep /treasure / hold on to the truths of God's Word that set us free. The beautiful thing about holding onto the gifts of God is to know that as we do so, He is holding on to us.

On the way to the church office this past week, I was doing some worrying, and as is most often the case, about situations over which I have no control. Not so much about our life together here at Faith Lutheran, but mostly about my mother in law and our four kids and 16 grandchildren, including 7 teenagers, and what was going on in their lives. I could feel this knot forming in my stomach, and some fear rising up in my heart. Then I heard a Christian songwriter named Lauren Daigle sing

“Hold On To Me.” These words in particular spoke into my soul, and I pray they speak into yours this morning:

When the best of me is barely breathin, when I'm not somebody I believe in, hold on to me. When I miss the light the night has stolen, when I'm slammin all the doors you've opened, hold onto me. Hold onto me when it's too dark to see You, When I am sure I have reached the end, Hold onto me when I forget I need You. When I let go, hold me again. When I don't feel like I'm worth defending, When I'm tired of all my pretending, Hold onto me. When I start to break in desperation, Underneath the weight of expectation, Hold onto me. Hold onto me when it's too dark to see ...I could rest here in Your arms forever, cause I know nobody loves me better.

To be loved and valued and provided for by God in heaven above is the key to letting go of the anxieties and the distractions that weigh us down. Not one, nor two, but three good reasons Jesus would give us today for letting go of that which keeps us awake at nights and trusting in Him above all else.

Good reason #1 for not being anxious is that it's a silly thing to worry about what might happen tomorrow instead of enjoying and being grateful for blessings received one day at a time. Worrying has been compared to rocking back and forth in a rocking chair. It's something to do, but it doesn't get you anywhere.

Jesus would take His early disciples and us aside today and ask, O ye of little faith, Which of you, by worrying, can make ourselves taller or more slender? O ye of little faith, which of you, by worrying, can add a single hour to our life or another thousand dollars to our 401K? O you of little faith, which of you, by worrying, can help our adult children have a better marriage or our teenage grandchildren avoid making mistakes? O you of little faith, which of you, by worrying, can solve important problems or accomplish great things?

Good reason #2 for not worrying about that which we cannot control is a lesson from nature. It is an argument from the lesser to the greater. The lilies of the field neither toil nor spin themselves sick with worry. Yet day after day, God clothes them with a splendor and a beauty unmatched even by King Solomon in all of his glory. If God is willing to provide for the lilies which are of lesser value, how much more is He willing to make sure that our basic necessities are in order?

Or consider the ravens, the scavenger birds, the unclean birds Israelites were forbidden to eat, the lowest of the low. The ravens, who neither sow nor reap, nor do they build storehouses and barns. And yet God feeds them. Ravens are even

used by God to serve two or more heroes of the Bible. It was a raven sent out first by Noah to check if the flood waters had receded. It was ravens God used to feed Elijah in the wilderness. If God is willing to provide for the ravens and if not a single sparrow falls to the ground without the Father's permission, why would we ever doubt the great value He has placed on us? Which brings us to reason #3, which is an argument from the greater to the lesser.

Good Reason #3 for not being anxious about what the future may bring is in the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus suffered every bit of agony He was appointed to suffer. It's on a little hill outside of Jerusalem, where the Father showed us exactly how much He cares for us. It's at the cross, where Jesus was publicly shamed and crucified until He was dead and buried. It's at the empty tomb, where the victory over sin and death and the devil himself was sealed for time and eternity.

The kingdom of God is like a little flock of believers not too far from the Gulf of Mexico, to whom it is their Father's good pleasure to give the Kingdom. As often as they sit still and know that God is God, a calmness sweeps over their midst. As often as they fix their eyes on their Savior, a strength rises up in their collective hearts. As often as they eat and drink at their Lord's Supper, they rest in the promises of God. They are assured of things hoped for. They believe that which they cannot see.

Truth #1 today is that to be valued by God is to have a faith that sits still and receives.

Truth #2 is that To be valued by God is to have a faith stands up and pursues.

And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

While it is true that we are saved by faith alone, it is also true that faith never comes alone. Saving faith is alive with good works ordained by God before we were ever born. When Jesus urges His early disciples to sell their possessions and give to the needy, He was not calling them to a vow of poverty. He was wanting them to know they didn't have to worry about their needs being filled. They had

the kingdom and a loving Father, and therefore they could risk being generous in supplying the needs of those around them.

When Jesus declared that His followers should be dressed for action, He meant that it is not enough for us to avoid doing wrong. We are to be actively involved in doing what is right and good.

Debi and I are living in a 55 and over community named The Hammocks, which is a part of Cypress Village, which is a part of Sugarmill Woods. It's a terrific place to live, and one of the perks is that young and hard working men mow our lawn and trim our bushes and keep our neighborhood looking picture perfect. But in addition to that, there is an elderly woman who lives nearby who chooses to go above and beyond what the paid lawn service folks do. She is very stooped over, and she moves very slowly, but the other morning, she was mowing with her own little lawn mower one of the common areas. Another morning, she was spotted pulling weeds out of that same area. She wasn't just following the rules and regulations of our Home Owner's Association. She was actively doing what is good and right and helpful.

The kingdom of God is like a congregation of believers not too far from the Gulf of Mexico full of folks well into their golden years. They have their bad days, their good days, and their really good days.

On their bad days, they worry about what is going on in their family, in their church, and in their country. They lose sleep over what tomorrow might bring, they are stressed out more often than not, and they waste all kinds of energy distracted by circumstances over which they have no control.

On their good days, they confess their faults and their failures to God and one another, at which time the grace of God sweeps over their souls and a calmness covers their hearts. They rest in the promises of God, they make lists of goals they still want to accomplish in life, and they enjoy life, one day at a time.

On their really good days, they go above and beyond what normal people would expect of them. They look for opportunities to listen to broken hearts. Their gratefulness to God spills over with a generosity that is contagious in their circle of family and friends. In Jesus' Name. Amen.