

Sermon for Trinity 15 – Matthew 6:24-34

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

“No one can serve two masters, for 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 God and money.” Christ’s words remind us that the Lord our God is a jealous God. He will not share His adoration with anyone or anything else. His first commandment states this clearly: “You shall have no other God’s before me.” This means we should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

But when it comes to gods, there really are only 2 options. One god has many names, even as many as you could possibly want or imagine. You can call him "god." You can call him "Allah," or "Buddha," or simply make up a new name. He doesn't mind. He'll go by anything. He acts as the gentlest and noblest of all lords. Unlike the other God, he isn't jealous. He doesn't make any demands of his servants. He is convenient, never embarrassing, never harsh, never confrontational, never condemning. He encourages his followers to enjoy themselves and indulge themselves in whatever they like. He is never shocked by lewd behavior or sin. He understands. Life under him is a smorgasbord of personal choices and preferences. He tells his servants that they can have as many masters as they want.

One of the names that this false god goes by is the name ‘tolerance.’ He finds common ground among all faiths, seeking peace and prosperity regardless of cost. His motto is acceptance of all with no limits. He is open-minded. He is enlightened. He holds no one to Biblical doctrine and morals. How many times have we worshipped at the altar of this false god? How often have we ignored open and outright sin? How often have we neglected the Scriptures clear teachings? How often have we watered down the true confession of the faith to make Christianity more appealing to others? I guarantee you that Christ our Savior is more concerned with the growth of His church than we are. The Lord will not give us a teaching that is harmful to His church. Faithfulness to pure doctrine will never hurt the mission and outreach of the church. And we’re called to faithful to Christ; we’re called to be faithful to His Word of Truth.

But our Lord points out another name of this false god by name in today’s Gospel: “You cannot serve God and money.” ‘Money’ is another name of this false god and what the King James Version calls ‘mammon.’ It’s simply undeniable that we love, yes; we devote ourselves to this false god. Don’t believe me? What about our expensive cars with the burdensome payments that put stress our life and family? What about our pursuit of the next smart phone that promises to entertain us? Do we ever call to question the main assumption of our culture that better clothes, nicer cars, larger homes, better technology, or whatever makes us more blessed and makes us more respectable? Can you look our consumeristic culture in the eye and tell it, ‘No’?

When you use a hammer to try and turn a screw, you’ll do damage. Much like if you make God’s gift of money your chief joy; you’ll do damage. You’re using God’s good gifts in a way in which they were never intended to be used. If you love gold, if you set your hopes on wealth, if you hitch your value to material success, you’ve sunk

yourself into a pathetic, yet devastating trap. Not to mention, you've robbed your neighbor, who needs you to be better than that. The love of money is vain and debilitating. No one has ultimate control over whether wealth will last or even if it will benefit one's family. Money doesn't satisfy. So don't pour your water into a leaky vessel. Possessions have no ultimate value. Yes, this truth can be ignored for a long time, especially if someone accumulates considerable wealth and is also blessed with good health. Nevertheless, we started life naked; if we die before Christ's return, we will exit this world naked. Possessions are ever and always intended to be seen and received as gifts from the Giver, and they are to direct our attention to Him. The genius of Luther's explanation of the 4th petition of the Our Father is putting the gifts and the Giver into proper perspective: "God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving." True worship belongs to the Giver and not to His gifts.

And yet, we are physical beings; we need certain amounts of possessions, and food is a good thing. We're not called to extreme asceticism or denial of the physical. We're called to faith. We're called to acknowledge that what we have in this life is our portion allotted to us from God Himself. This faith is rooted in Christ who taught that God provides for non-laboring lilies, that God provides for the birds that make no investments for the future. And yet, Christ didn't come in the form of a lily or bird, but He was made man. He died for you to make your eternal future secure. As opposed to the god of many faces, He is the One God of One Baptism, of One sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins, and of One Communion in His Body and in His Blood. He is the God of Truth. He is the God of Light, and not the god of ambiguity and shadows. He is Life. But this God is found in death. If you will be His, than you can belong to no other god. But you need no other god. For no other god is of any help, comfort, or aid. Jesus is One, the only One. And He still wants you. He still seeks you. "[He] has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness."

In Christ, there is work to be done, and our work serves a greater end than amassing "stuff." When our Lord demotes our daily toil and our material accumulation to their proper place, there is joy for us in each day. Our daily bread becomes a means through which we give thanks to God the Father and find contentment in Christ alone.

Slow down. Enjoy each day as God gives it to you, and leave the rest to Him. Stop and smell the lilies. Look at the birds of the air. Ponder what it is to be a creature whose needs are met completely and entirely by a loving Father. Long for what Christ has done for you. "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠