

“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.” We heard these same words a few weeks ago as our Lord commented on His parable of the dishonest manager. The word translated as “money,” is “mammon,” which certainly includes money, but is a shorthand for any material wealth, worldly gain. Not just in these two places, but over and over, our Lord gives clear warning against the idea that we can set our heart on God and the things of this world. It is a central concern of Jesus.

He does this so often because we often act as though we can do just that. We know, intellectually, that that we can't. There is no such thing as effective multi-tasking. And yet I continually try to read a book and watch a movie at the same time. I end up either closely following one or the other, or, more often, I don't really get much out of either. I never track well with both. Children are acutely aware that you cannot attend to them, hear what they are saying, while we adults fidget with that little glowing screen in the palm of our hand. A teenage boy with his brand-new driver's license knows intellectually that he is not immortal, knows that car accidents happen. But the way he drives, betrays what he believes: “Nothing can touch me, nothing will hurt me.”

And so there is a temptation to that delusion, to devote our attention and energy to things of this body and life: to what we shall eat, drink, what we shall wear. Despite the fact that what we confess in our praying the Lord's Prayer, is that our Father in heaven **“certainly gives daily bread to everyone without their prayer, even to all evil people.”** He's going to do it. He has created you with these needs of food, drink, and clothing. He is not only the Creator; He is also the Provider. To believe in God, the Father Almighty, is to believe not only that He has made, past tense, but also that He continues to give, to care for, present tense, ongoing work.

He gives what is necessary for the life He creates, whether a person is a believer or not. As a Christian you recognize that God has provided for your very greatest need; has sent His Son to be your Savior. And if He has such regard for your salvation, will He not, therefore, care for what you need in this life as well? Of course, He will! We see this in the ministry of Jesus. The Living Bread from heaven who comes to give spiritual life to the world that He might raise them up to eternal life on the last day, shows this heavenly truth by giving real bread to fill real stomachs of real people who are really hungry.

God says in His Word that He does care for the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea, and the flowers of the field. But all the more Holy Scripture makes clear that He is not the Father of these things. It is you whom He has taken to be His child. It is you who are the pinnacle of His visible creation, more excellent than all the birds, of far more value to Him than all the other things of the earth. Because it is not these things that have been fashioned in the image of God, made holy by His Spirit, and in whom the Father and the Son come to make their home. It is you.

It is unbelief, doubt of these truths, that obsesses over things that Christian faith teaches us to rest confident that God will provide. Unbelief makes these things the sum of life, makes the things of this body and life our highest good. It is unbelief that drives us into the frenzy to acquire yet more. It is unbelief that is at work in the anxiety that causes us to fret over trifles, or to refuse to humbly commit our labors to God, for Him to give the outcome and success according to His good will for us.

You know and claim as your very own the reconciliation with God, the salvation won for you by our Lord Jesus Christ. You have the love and favor of God unto eternal life. If the most important and difficult thing has already been achieved and given you at the expense of His own Son, know that this same God is not going to allow you to lack those things that are necessary for you, which He freely gives out of sheer goodness even to flowers and birds, and which He has particularly promised to give you.

As the church begins a new year of instruction and study for our children and for adults, it is fitting and necessary to apply these words of our Lord a bit more broadly to our lives, beyond just concerns for food and drink. By God's grace, our way of living in this land has largely removed the need for real concern for daily bread from our lives. Very rarely do we actually need to have concern for how we are going to eat our next meal. When we find our pantry empty, we know where to go to get food. And if the bank account should ever have insufficient funds, in case there be any doubt should you ever

be in need, know that your congregation, your brothers and sisters in Christ, are happy and ready to be God's providing hands for you!

The temptations and sins we struggle with are frequently of another kind than serving food and drink. We, and especially our families, our young people, are faced with the same basic problem that our Lord addresses. A more than warranted care for mammon, for things of this world. An enjoyment, a fear of losing them that easily leads us into a devotion to them that rightly belongs only to God and His Word. Our chief care in this world is to become and remain citizens of heaven, heirs of the coming kingdom of glory. We are bid, Jesus says, to **"Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness."** That does not mean "Seek the kingdom and God's righteousness first, and then, once you have that, you can move on down the priority list." "First" here means "first in all things, above all others, especially this." In your daily living, the care that governs and ranks above all others is the kingdom of God, His righteousness.

As they do with food and drink which they think they must provide for themselves, the Gentiles, that is, unbelievers, attend to the busyness and things of this world, temporal things, things that will fade away, with devotion. Because it is all they have. These things are their only and true joy. It is not so with you. There are good things in this life, gifts of God out of His love for our enjoyment and learning and growth. But these things are not the purpose of living. That is the danger of our day. To live for pleasure, to live for mere worldly joy. To make things that are given for leisure the purpose of our life to the point that we are devoted to them, and fear the loss of them.

Do not live in a way that communicates to others, especially to your children, that there are things that are more important than God, His Word, and the Divine Service. I can say all I want, that I know intellectually that God is the most important thing in my life. We can say this to our children over and over. And yet by the way we actually live, the manner in which we order our lives, what we give priority to in our schedules, communicates far more powerfully than anything that we can say, that we don't actually believe that.

So I implore you all, parents especially, do not let things of this world and life be reasons for yourselves or your children to miss the things of God. Let it be, rather, the other way around. It will be one way or the other. Jesus says that. **"You cannot serve"** both. It is not possible. Have your allegiance with, teach your children to be devoted to God, His kingdom, His righteousness. Not just on Sunday morning, but in all your life.

So I posit to you two basic, fundamental, non-negotiable essentials for the Christian, for the Christian home:

1. Go to church every Sunday. Obviously, there are times when someone is sick or there is a blizzard. But unless someone has been throwing up all night, or your 45-degree incline driveway is covered with a foot of snow, the question, "Are we going to church this week?" doesn't need to be asked. Seek the kingdom and God's righteousness by entering into it and receiving it each week.
2. Read the Bible and pray as a household every day. Breathing or eating once a week doesn't keep you alive. You need the Word of God. You need His life-giving speaking to you and the sustaining bread of the Gospel every day. No child gets out of talking to mom and dad each day, sharing what happened, what was good, what was bad. Call upon your heavenly Father, present your needs, anxieties, your joys, to Him.

These are not simply the two steps to make God happy with you by your doing this. Obviously when we hear and learn God's Word it pleases Him, it is His will for us. But that is not what makes Him pleased with you. What Christian faith recognizes, what Jesus bids us to see, what He graciously invites us to, is the confidence that we need not fret, or worry or be anxious, neither about the things of this body and life, nor how our God is disposed toward us in Christ Jesus. In His Word, from Jesus' own lips, you have the promise of the Father's gracious provision. His provision of your daily bread, and His provision of food for your soul. He gives them both freely out of His grace for us in Christ Jesus.

Each week, every day, He provides for you, His Christians, the way to be shaped by, filled with, the Word that instructs you in how you should live, that reassures you in the cares and matters of this life, that gives you His blessing and help in all your undertakings, that continually, unceasingly strengthens you in His Word and faith, teaching you to trust in Him who has already promised to give you all things: salvation, sustenance, contentment, peace, and rest in Him.