

Sermon for Trinity 15 – Matthew 6:24-34  
In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

“Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ... If God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?”

Something new. Something different. Something else. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob rescued His children from the mighty Egyptians, brought them safely through the sea and led them through the desert wilderness. They ate manna from heaven. They feasted on fattened quail. Without toil or sweat, without thorns and thistles, God’s people were filled with heavenly food. Yet their appetites were not satisfied and they complained bitterly against God. Rescued from slavery and fed on bread from heaven, without a need in the world, they wanted more – something new, something different, from something else.

The closed circuit of man’s misguided materialism is nothing new – aspirations become wants, wants become needs and self-gratification becomes a bottomless pit of self-deception. We speak loudly of the great good we would do for our community, for our parish, for Christian missions, if only we had more. But silently we think only of the personal leisure new wealth would bring us.

It is a powerful lie – that money will bring happiness. So we plot and plan and pursue every incremental dollar as though our lives depended on it. Oh, it’s never for us, of course. We chase after mammon for our children, for their education, for charity, for good causes. And when we’ve gained more than we ever needed or imagined, what do we have? After all we’ve done for them, our children still don’t listen and obey. As they grow older, they stray away from church, they drop out of school. But we, as parents, we’re no better. Our bellies bloated, our cupboards full, our retirements funded and our futures secure, we search for new diversions to fill the diminishing interval between now and eternity. Unsatisfied with the goods we so eagerly sought and having done little of the good we so often spoke, we find the world to be empty and boring.

That money brings happiness is the devil’s manna and we’ve eaten it without complaint. Greed is Satan’s bird and we’ve swallowed it whole. But instead of full and satisfied as we thought we’d be, we’re left empty and defiled. Repent, O man, for you cannot serve two masters. You cannot serve God and mammon. God is not mocked. He who sows to his flesh will reap corruption but he who sows to the Spirit will reap everlasting life.

Do you spend more time in worry or in prayer and confession? Who is your God when the “check-engine” light pops on in your car? Who is your God when your work hours are cut back or you lose your job? Who is your God when you miss your son or daughter who’s moved across town or across the country? Who is your God when the doctor comes back with bad news? Do you spend more time in worry or in prayer? Now flip it. Who is your God when you land the big promotion at work? Who is your God when you move into your great new home? Who is your God when your spouse is extra supportive or when your children make you look really good? Who do you praise other than yourself? Do you remember God in your suffering and your success?

Repent and seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and you’ll have more than you have ever dreamed or imagined or wanted. Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them all.

And the Lord, He cares for you! Why? Because you are of more value than birds! The Only Begotten Son of God did not die for sparrows. He did not take the form of a robin and come in the likeness of seagulls. He took on the form of a servant and came in the likeness of man. That's you! "And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." Bearing the world's sins He was a Worm and a reproach of men, despised by the people. Dangling as from a fish hook, Jesus Christ suffered and bled and died to catch you safely from the devil's river of greed and materialism. He was raised again on the third day by the glory of the Father and ascended to the right hand of glory. From thence He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

The Lord cares for you! Jesus feeds seed to the sparrows and worms to the robins, to be sure. Yet how much more does He care for you! He sows in you the greater Seed of His Holy Word, for the kingdom of God is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. He fills you with Seed that yields a hundredfold, the Seed of God's power for your salvation. He feeds you with His own flesh and quenches you with His holy precious blood – the Worm's meat for the forgiveness of your sins for life and for salvation. Our Father in Heaven provides you with more than daily bread to sustain you in this veil of tears. He feeds you with heavenly Manna to carry you, body and soul, into everlasting life.

"Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: They neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed like one of these." What silk or precious tapestry can compare to flowers? What shines in beauty like a lily? What manufactured dye surpasses the deep purple of a violet?

But the Lord cares more for you! Why? You are more precious to your Father than the lilies. He has clothed you with the wedding garment of everlasting righteousness. What rose possesses the reddened beauty of Christ's holy blood, which washes you clean for eternity? What lily shines as brightly as the incorruptible, glorified body, which shall be yours and appear at the trumpet fanfare? Our Father in Heaven covers you with the righteousness of His Son so you too may be called the sons of God with whom He is well pleased.

Though there is enough trouble for each day, you needn't worry. The troubles of this life will not last. Yet, your communion with God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit is already complete and will last ... forever! You need never run and chase after the devil's lies. You have the Truth, Who sets you free to everlasting life filled with eternal riches.

Please pray with me:

Dear Lord Jesus, You know how easily I worry despite your promises. You know how easy it is for me to be joyful and secure when I have a little more money than I need. Help me to take everything from your hand, being equally content in want and abundance. Help me through all the ups and downs in life to be just as glad, just as secure, and just as certain by the fact that you care for me and give me just what I need. Amen.

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

*\*This sermon (with some modifications and additions) was preached by the Rev. E.R. Fickel, who serves as pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Chesterton, IN. The closing was based on a prayer written by Lutheran Bishop Bo Giertz (1905-1998) in the volume "To Live with Christ" (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008, translated by Richard Wood and Bror Erickson)*