

Sermon on Matthew 6:25-33  
Thanksgiving Eve, November 25, 2009  
Lutheran Church of the Redeemer  
By James Erlandson

Sometimes it seems that there are two kinds of people in this world: those who worry about absolutely everything, and those who don't worry about a thing. There are some people who worry about catching a cold when it's 70 degrees outside. They have a job and worry about losing it, have nice things and worry about someone stealing it all, have wonderful kids and worry about them joining a gang or doing drugs, in perfect health and worry about crossing the street. On the other extreme, there are those who don't seem to have a care in the world, but should be a lot more careful! They spend money without saving a dime, wear T-shirts and shorts when it's below freezing (I've seen lots of kids do this at the school bus stop!), and never go to the doctor or dentist even when regular check-ups are a key to good health. Do you know anybody like this? Do YOU fit either of these bills? Maybe they seem extreme to you. I know that most "Lutherans" try to fit somewhere in between these extremes, living life in moderation, never too hot nor too cold, not to worry too much or too little, always just a little above average. That's the key to Lutheran lives - if you believe Garrison Keillor!

In the gospel lesson today, it appears that someone has interrupted Jesus' Sermon on the Mount to ask Jesus where their next meal was coming from. It seems that Jesus was preaching for quite a long time, and people were starting to get hungry. (This happened a few times before, such as when Jesus had to feed 5000 people with loaves and fishes because it was getting too late to send them home to eat!) It was probably a disciple, getting worried about what all these people were going to eat - or what HE was going to have for supper! It doesn't say so in the scripture passage we just heard, but I just think someone was getting hungry, and was worried about food or shelter, or getting home, or something! So what did Jesus have to say to all this concern?

Jesus said, "*There I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?*"

Sounds to me like Jesus didn't have anything for them to eat, or any plan to get them any! His answer to his disciples' worries was to say: NOT TO WORRY!

Seriously, though, Jesus does have a teaching here for a very basic concern that we human beings have: what are we going to eat and drink today or tomorrow? Will I have a place to sleep tonight? Will I be alright in the future? Will I survive? Jesus' response is basically this: God will provide. God cares for all God's creatures, and God cares for you and me. So don't worry so much.

Why? Because worrying never helps anything! Jesus gives us plenty of examples from the natural kingdom. The birds of the air don't worry about what they will sow or reap, do they? God takes care of them! And aren't you of more value than a sparrow? Worrying about things won't add a minute to your life! So don't worry about clothing or food or shelter, because God will take care of you like God cares for the birds and the animals of this world. Sounds good to me, but I'm always waiting for the other shoe to drop: don't worry – just get to work! If you want to eat, get to work! And like Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind* - you'll never be hungry again! That's the Puritan ethic: work and earn your keep, work and earn your own salvation! Except Jesus never said that! Jesus continues to say “don't worry so much about your life; have faith in God who cares for you!”

Jesus makes an example of his followers' many concerns – “What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?” He says it's the Gentiles (the non-believers) who strive for all these things, and surely your heavenly Father knows that you need them. “*But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*” Hmmmm – this sounds like a song – almost like a camp song, like *kumbaya!* Well, it is a song, and our youth are going to sing it for you tonight, but the song is based on these actual words of Jesus, that are central to our faith. Seek the Lord, strive for God's kingdom, to live as God has taught you, and everything else will fall into place.

What does this mean? Take the analogy of an athlete. Maybe a Viking football player. The reason a football player spends hours practicing their plays over and over is so that they don't have to think about what they are doing – when it comes to the game, they should just be playing the game without thinking. If they worry about catching the ball, they are going to drop it for sure! (Ever see an athlete try to play when they're worried about their job, or dropping the ball? They drop it every time!) Same with a musician. The great musicians practice for hours on end, sometimes the same portion of music, so they don't have to think about playing all the notes. When it comes to the concert, they just play the music or sing the song – without worrying about the notes or when to take a breath! For if they do, the whole piece of music can fall apart!

Maybe that's what the Christian life is! If you and I have to think about every single commandment, or what Jesus would have us do every moment, we may never get out of our pews or off our knees in prayer! If we have to think so much about how we are living, we may never actually live at all! Actually, I like what Martin Luther once had to say about this: he said, “*Sin boldly!*” I don't think he meant do bad things as much as you can. I think he meant to live without worrying so much about making mistakes or what is a sin – instead, seek to be faithful, to learn how God would have us live, and try to imitate Jesus with your life, but don't worry so much that you don't do anything at all! If you do wrong,

so be it – confess your sin and move on. It’s like the doctor’s oath – do your best to help those who come to you for help, but don’t be so afraid to make a mistake that you don’t do anything at all – the main thing is *to do no harm!*

So, we Americans seem to have a lot to worry about these days, even in the wealthiest land in the world. We worry about our mortgages, our jobs, our health care, our safety, and our futures. I guess it makes sense – if you think about it, there truly is an awful lot to worry about, isn’t there? But if you dwell on these things, it will drive you crazy! And you may not be able to do anything at all, worrying about making a wrong choice or a bad decision.

But most of our worries come from thinking that we are all alone in this world, that our futures depend solely on us making all the right choices and preparing everything around us like a safety net. This is where we are wrong. Because if we truly are alone, then we have everything to worry about! But we are not alone! God the Father in heaven cares about us all, and has sent his Son Jesus to be present with us and the whole world through the Church – the body of Christ. The remedy for all our worries about our lives is to place our trust and hope in God, who has made us part of a whole human family on which we can rely. You are a child of God, who has promised to love you, care for you, forgive you when you fall short and pick you up when you are down.

As part of a family, you and I have countless brothers and sisters in Christ to reach out to us when we need help. And when our brothers and sisters are in need, we are called to reach out to them as well. That’s how it all works in God’s kingdom! For we are not like the rest of the world – we are brothers and sisters in Christ after all, not strangers and aliens to each other! This is why Jesus tells us not to worry – for we are loved by God, and part of a body that is connected by faith, hope, and love.

It seems to me that on this day of Thanksgiving, we should recognize this gift of God and be thankful for it – just as we are thankful for the food that we eat, the clothes that we wear, for the roof over our head and the safety in which we live. For sometimes we may not have all these things – and God knows some of our brothers and sisters do not have enough to eat, or wear, or sufficient shelter or health care. This is when our connection to each other is critical. This is when we need to share the blessings God has given us, so that everyone has enough.

So how do you and I get beyond worrying about ourselves or having “enough?” When by faith we place our hope and trust in God, who has given us all that we need, who provides the way, the truth, and the life through our Savior, Jesus Christ. Thank God for the mercy and grace so lovingly provided to us, and for the Son who guides us on the path to life. May God grant us grace and faith to go beyond our worries to trust in God’s mercy, and make us truly thankful, so that we share with others the mercy and love which we have been given. Amen.