

Luke 12:22-40

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Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho
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3 Laws and 7 Comforts for Worry

The Word of the Lord from Luke 12:32: “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” This is the Word of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Last week, Jesus spoke about possessions and the sin of covetousness. This week, He speaks about possessions and the sin of worry. There’s plentiful law and gospel to be found in our gospel reading, so let’s get started.

When it comes to worry and anxiety, Jesus makes the law very simple: Don’t be anxious. He says, “Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on.” That should take care of it, shouldn’t it? Are you anxious? Then stop it.

Despite this clear command, however, you might still feel some anxiety. You could use a little more persuasion. So Jesus tells you to consider the ravens: they’re pretty cool as birds go, but they’re terrible at gardening, have no storehouse, barn or investment portfolio; and yet they survive. Why? Because God feeds them. If God takes care of ravens, do you really worry that God is going to forget about you? Do you regard God to be so flawed that, despite His promises, He’s going to ignore you and play with the birds all day? He’s a lot better than that. If He takes care of ravens, then why would He stop taking care of you? If that’s why you’re anxious, then stop it.

Still not convinced? Then think about lilies and grass, here today and gone tomorrow in the summer heat. Why do they live as long as they live? Because God watches over them. Why are they clothed so beautifully in appearance? Because God gives them their beauty. Do you really think that God values grass more highly than you? What kind of faith do you have? If that’s why you’re anxious, then stop it.

It that’s not enough to cure you, Jesus gives another command: Don’t worry. He says, “Do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried.” In fact, He’s going to tell you a couple verses later that, rather than worry about food and clothing, you should instead “Sell your possessions and give to the needy.” Your stuff is going to rot anyway, so you might as well give it away. Why worry about keeping it? And if you give it away, why be anxious about having less?

Jesus tells you not to be anxious and not to worry. If you’re still not cured, He adds one more related command: “Fear not.” After all, anxiety and worry go with fear: if you weren’t afraid of things, you wouldn’t be anxious and worried. Therefore, don’t be afraid. Stop it.

We should add that, along with some pretty common concerns like food, clothing and daily essentials, you can also be good at developing some pretty exotic fears. In other words, you can develop anxieties and phobias about things that pose absolutely no threat whatsoever. You can also devote a fair amount of mental energy to worrying about things that haven’t happened and probably won’t happen, but *might* happen. I mean, just because this sanctuary *hasn’t* been destroyed by falling space junk yet, doesn’t mean it *won’t*.

In response to all of this, I say what Jesus said: Don’t be anxious. Don’t worry. Fear not. Stop it.

What more do you need? We should be able to end the sermon right here. You shouldn't be worried anymore. Except that you are. Telling you not to worry is about as helpful as telling you to levitate around the room: no matter how much you want to, telling you doesn't give you the power to do it. The law of God demands, but gives you no power to fulfill it. In fact, you might be worse than when you arrived: when you got here this morning, you had some worries. Now, on top of that, you might be worried that you worry so much.

And you know it's wrong to worry, because you know – as Jesus says – that worry, anxiety and fear mean that you have little faith ... and little faith sounds like something else to worry about. Worry and little faith go together, while freedom from worry and a strong faith go together. The second is far better, but how will you get there?

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We've arrived at a crossroads in this sermon, two different paths with two very different ends. You'll be tempted to take the wrong path every single time before you know it.

The wrong path is to say, "The key is just to stop worrying. When that anxiety starts to well up and pressure my mind and heart, I will just push it back down, put on a smile and take some deep breaths until I'm calm. Therefore, when I start to worry, I will tell myself to look on the bright side. I will count my blessings and make a list of how the good outweighs the bad. If I work hard enough, I will be worry-free."

That may not sound like the wrong path; and for mental wellbeing, it's good to practice such resolve. However, it doesn't do anything *for faith*. I'll also add that, if it didn't help you when I told you stop worrying, why do expect better when *you* tell yourself? Now I feel kind of hurt.

The other path is far better, and we begin with this question: if your faith is little and weak, how does it become big and strong? The answer should be obvious: faith is fed by forgiveness. It's strengthened by a steady diet of the Lord's Word and Sacraments. It's nourished by the promises of God.

In other words, when you struggle with worry, anxiety and fear, don't push it back down inside and count on *yourself* to conquer it. Confess it, knowing that you need a greater conqueror to deliver you, and trusting that Christ is He!

Then, as one forgiven, re-read our gospel text and *marvel* ... marvel at all the comforting promises that God makes to you.

First, Jesus tells you that your life is more than food. He's not merely saying that there's more to life than a good meal, but reminding you that your life is found in Him. Christ died and rose again to join you to Himself: and if He lives forever, you have everlasting life.

Second, Jesus tells you that you are of far more value than the birds, and that doesn't just mean that you're a higher priority on God's list when it comes to feeding time. That value, that worth, is about salvation: God did not send His only-begotten Son to become a bird in order to save birds. He sent Him to become man to save you. Jesus became flesh and dwelt among us to be your Savior. He didn't shed His blood for ravens. He shed His blood for you.

Third, Jesus asks, "And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?" The answer is "no one;" but within that question is the reminder that it is the Lord who numbers your days. For the sake of His Son, who died for you, He hasn't just added a single hour to your life. Because of Jesus, He's added eternity.

Fourth, Jesus tells you not to worry about what you are to eat and drink, because “your Father knows that you need them.” Your *Father*, says Jesus. What joy! God is not some distant deity who dumped the world as a failed science project and has left you to yourself. He’s not even an fair-minded King who will give you food and drink when you’ve earned it by groveling enough. Because you’re redeemed by the blood of His Son, He’s your Father. He is actively looking out for you, providing what you need, working all things for your good.

Fifth, Jesus tells you to seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you. It’s not, “If you’re a good-enough kingdom-seeker, then God will reward you with peace of mind.” It’s more like, “Hey you – child of God, remember that the King, Jesus, died and rose to give you gifts like forgiveness, grace, salvation, as well as God’s favor so that you can be sure that your Father is working all things for your good. So, run to the King who does all this for you! Seek the King where He is at work, because He is as near to you as His means of grace.”

Sixth, Jesus says, “It is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom!” God, your Father, is in totally agreement with His Son and wants you to have all these gifts of grace and salvation. In doing so, you have the treasures in heaven that do not fail, as Jesus also mentions in the text.

In fact, seventh, look at that little parable at the end of the reading:

Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them.

Did you catch how the kingdom works? The master comes home from a wedding feast and the servants open the door. What happens next? What *should* happen is that the servants welcome the master, usher him to a comfortable seat, ease off his boots, prop up his feet and hand him an appropriate beverage. Not in this house: the master gets home, *he* puts on servants’ clothes and serves the servants! So it is for you: for now, your King Jesus visits in His means of grace to forgive your sins and strengthen your faith. On the day He returns in glory at an hour you do not expect, He doesn’t come hoping to catch you goofing off. He comes to deliver you – deliver you to the marriage feast of the Lamb, which has no end.

This is such a fantastic text: even as Jesus tells you not to worry, He fills up your ears with all sorts of good news, and by that good news He strengthens your faith. Look: as a general rule, the more I trust someone, the less I need to worry about them or my relationship to them. The key to managing worry and distress in this life is faith in Jesus, the faith that He gives in His service to you. The more you hold fast to His promises, the more you will see Him at work for your good in the most worrisome of situations – and the more you will be confident that He will deliver you from all of your fears.

Fear not, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen