

“The Big Picture”
Luke 12:22-34
Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
August 11, 2019

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

Our text, Jesus begins our text saying, “I tell you, do not be anxious about your life...” and near the end of the text, he comforts you, “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As we were wrapping up our meditation on Colossians the last few weeks, the Gospel reading was beginning a focus on Jesus’ preaching in Luke 11 and 12, a discourse wherein he teaches his disciples how to pray; encourages them to be assured that asking, seeking, and knocking *will* be heard by the heavenly Father; and admonishes them not to store up riches for themselves in storehouses while living with empty hearts devoid of faith in God.

This morning, that discourse continues as Jesus encourages his hearers (and us) not to worry about life’s provisions. Now this would seem simple enough; we’ve all heard in times of anxiety, the comparison to the birds of the air and the lilies of the field and the promise that we are more valuable to God than are they. This is one of those texts that we think we know backward and forward, almost to the point in which we sinners take the words for granted and are

not comforted by them: “Yeah, I’ve heard that one before, but I still worry. What else you got for me?”

Repent of such certainty that there’s nothing else to learn from these words, nothing else by which to be comforted. Instead, dig a little deeper.

Consider the first verse of our text: “He said to his disciples, ‘Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life.’” That verse right there should bring you all comfort and confidence and peace, for Jesus here appeals to the certainty that lies in the authority of *His Word*: “Therefore, *I tell you*.” Sometimes, the Scriptures record him saying, “Truly, truly, I say to you,” and we know that he is introducing a divine and weighty truth. Here, he does not say, “Truly, truly,” but he *does* use the rest of the phrase, “λεγω υμιν” – I say to you. This is not incidental, and it teaches us how to appreciate this text more deeply:

... for, sometimes, when we hear these familiar words, we think they are Jesus’ words of how we are to comfort *ourselves*, how we are to *cheer* ourselves, as if he’s merely giving us a slap on the back and saying, “C’mon, look at those flowers, those birds. Think about it. Shouldn’t you consider yourself more important than those. Cheer up, think positive thoughts. Put on a smile and that power of positive thinking will turn your life around.”

But he doesn’t make an appeal to our own authority to bring cheer. He doesn’t point us within and say, “You have the power to

make you happy and bring you comfort.” Rather, he appeals to *his* authority, as if to say, “*Why* should you take comfort? *Why* should you be of good cheer? *Why* should you not worry? Because *I* tell you... *I* say to you... *I* give you a window into the Father’s love and *I* proclaim promises that are yours from above.”

Is not this an additional benefit of the cross of Christ, that he who went to the cross, nailed sin to the cross, overcame the cross and the grave, by it He has proven himself trustworthy and earned the right to demand and capture our confidence in *Him* and *His* Word. If *He* tells you something, if *He* takes a stand and makes a guarantee and stakes His reputation on it, the cross reminds you that you have no reason to doubt, but every reason to lift your drooping head and open your ears and shut your mouth and silence your doubts and listen to His promises and comfort.

And what does He then say in our text? “I tell you, Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on.”

Let’s focus on that word “anxious.” In the Greek, it connotes “a *part*, as opposed to *the whole*” so that one who is anxious could be described in one of two ways, either as one who “focusing on a part of the picture, misses the whole big picture” or as one whose psyche is “pulled apart, parts from the whole, a falling to pieces.” Both images describe us well at times, don’t they? And Jesus hints at both descriptions as the text continues. He says, “do not be anxious

about your life, what you will eat.” The word for “life” there is ψυχη, the word from which we get the word, “psyche.” When you are anxious about your life, it’s your psyche that is under duress. Your psyche, not your stomach, worries about what you will eat... whether you will have enough, whether it will be healthy for you... the stomach might growl and tell your mind that it’s hungry, but it’s the psyche that worries. It’s the psyche that anxiously tries to define whether your life is safe or in danger. It’s the psyche that becomes fixated on “*this* small part and facet of life” and ignores the rest until “*this* part” is dealt with... as an infant will ignore even his own soiled diaper until he gets fed! There’s a bigger picture out there, but the psyche is so focused on the part that it cannot see the entirety. So Jesus says, “Do not be anxious... because life is *more than* food.” Notice that word choice and how it hints at the first of the two images painted by this word “anxious.” It’s as if Jesus says, “You’re worried about the small part, but the big picture is *more than* food, *more than* clothing.”

How often do our children seem fixated on one thing, one passion, one ‘idol’ – whether it be: *dessert* even before the *meal* has begun, or video games at the expense of beautiful summer weather or as more favorable than a family day trip... or maybe it’s a new fashion trend, or sports, or especially the attention of a potential boyfriend or girlfriend that brings them to the point of obsessive worry, as if nothing else matters. But where do they learn to obsess

and worry over such things but from watching adults become so infatuated with the one thing that brings comfort or the one anxiety that dominates dinner discussion or even drives a wedge into marriage and the family, so that it seems parents and adults have lost any sight of a bigger picture... any confidence that Christ's promises dictate the bigger picture and, thus, will see us through this particular worrisome "*part of the whole.*"

"Do not worry," Jesus says, "Life is more than the one thing you worry about."

Later on, Jesus uses the second image of "anxious" ... the image of "falling to pieces" and "being pulled apart" by our anxieties; he says, "Which of you, by being anxious, can add a single hour to his span of life?" Oh, we sinners tout our doctrine and our faith in God as written in our confessional books, then we toss and turn all night and our blood pressure goes through the roof, and we take anxiety medication... all because we've failed to internalize what is in those books of doctrine. We fall to pieces and wring our hands and 'pull ourselves apart' over our anxieties, and it adds not a single second to life, but only wastes however much time we've spent worrying... all because we've forgotten that Christ did not teach us *to comfort ourselves*, but he said, "I say to you, you are *more valuable* to the Father than the rest of his creation that he loves."

More valuable, which the Father proves by sending Christ to the cross for you... not for the sparrows, not for the lilies... those,

too, are his created works, just as you are, but he sent Christ to the cross *for you*... and though the lilies and the sparrows return to the dust forever, bearing the consequences of the Fall they themselves did not cause, you and your ancestors, who collectively caused this world of fall and sin and consequences of anxiety and pain... you are spared its everlasting demise... for Christ promised *you*, not the sparrows, not the lilies, but *you* He promised escape from it all, in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. That's the bigger picture, isn't it, and we forget it! We forget it because we're torn to pieces by the 'parts' and the small anxieties by which Satan tempts to think Christ has lost control over the big picture and every detail on that canvas of that larger painting.

But, Christ opens your ears anew, "I say to you, you are more valuable... for I laid down my life for you and – on your behalf – I appeal to the Father with *my* righteousness and *my* meritorious sacrifice... that you may have every comfort and confidence to approach the throne of glory."

And with that confidence, Jesus – earlier in the chapter – had encouraged us, "ask, it will be given; seek, you will find; knock, the door will be opened to you." That certainty is ours in the small details of life because of the big picture of God for us because of Christ crucified.

Yet, interestingly, in our text for this morning – though just a chapter before Jesus had said "seek and you will find" – this

morning, he says, “do *not* seek”! That may seem contradictory, but how does he continue, “Do *not* seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried.” Notice his point; it’s not the asking, seeking, and knocking that is wrong... it’s seeking after these parts of the whole that cause us to fall to pieces that is wrong, idolatrous, and sinful... because it exhibits a lack of faith in Christ and a love for earthly-minded concerns rather than “setting our minds above, where Christ is” (as Paul told the Colossians).

Thus, it’s true: “Do not seek” to rely on yourself as the answer to all the little anxiety-inducing parts of life, rather seek the kingdom of God and the Christ who is the certainty of the big picture and therefore the answer to and provider of every little detail of that big picture. “Seek his kingdom,” Jesus says, “and these ‘things’ – these details, these parts – will be added unto you.”

Isn’t that the Old Testament lesson for this morning, that Abraham, who certainly did not believe in his *own* ability to make descendants for himself that would number the stars of heaven, he believed God’s promises. And, recall, when Abraham would later grow anxious and doubt whether God would provide as He had promised, what came of it, but sin and adultery and the impregnation of his servant girl, and an entire line of faithlessness, as Ishmael’s family history proves? What did Abraham add to anything by being anxious about God’s plan to provide him a son?

But, when resting in God's Word and promise, Abraham not only could have subjective emotional comfort, but he had the objective truth of God's favor. The Old Testament reading ends, "God *counted it to him* (credited him with something not his own, but given freely by God) he counted him as righteous."

In the same way, Jesus appeals to the big picture for you. And he does so by including an image that seems to come out of nowhere and have nothing to do with anything earlier in the discourse... He appeals to the image of the Shepherd's responsibility to care for the sheep: "Fear not, little flock," he says, and he reminds you that no sheep, by worrying about himself, can successfully outrun or dodge or escape the wolf; rather, the sheep – in fear and anxiety and in danger – have the comfort of the objective care of the Shepherd, who says, "I say to you, do not worry. I will keep you safe." Thus, Jesus the Good Shepherd, comforts you and points you to the big picture, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" ... that city, that heavenly city, He has prepared for you. There's your treasure – the kingdom of heaven! Not just food or clothing... those little parts will be added to the whole – but the kingdom!; there's your inheritance; there's the sustenance you're fed in Word and Sacrament solely because of the Shepherd's faithful duty to his little flock as faithful bestower of His Father's good pleasure.

That's the big picture for your life, little flock – Word, Sacrament, forgiveness, inheritance, resurrection – and in that big picture, all little details are well cared for. Thus, that big divine picture is your treasure; therefore, your anxious heart may rest there also.

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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