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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14C)

August 7, 2016

Text: Luke 12:12–34

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

Today, we return our attention back to the appointed gospel reading. And wouldn't you know it, the Lord Jesus is teaching on money and possessions. Ugh. Stewardship sermons. Get ready. It's time to increase our offerings. Well, not so fast. There's much more to consider here than Sunday offerings. Will we be challenged by our Lord's teaching? Most certainly. Take a quick look at vs. 34, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Those are words from Jesus. Whatever we treasure, that is, hold most dear and precious, is where we will place our heart, that deepest part of who we are. Keep that vs. in mind as we go through today's gospel text.

We begin with vs. 22–23, "Jesus said to his disciples, 'Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.'"

Food and clothing. You can't get more basic than that. Without food and drink, you die. Without clothing, you experience the shame of nakedness but eventually the elements of creation catch up with you and you die of exposure. Food and clothing are the non-negotiables of life. And Jesus has the nerve to tell you not to be anxious about them! Really?! I mean, I understand Jesus saying not to be worried about the niceties of life, the finer things. Maybe I don't need a new car, or a vacation, or the newest Smartphone, or whatever, but I must have food and clothing.

It's easy to dismiss Jesus as living in a simpler time. They didn't have concerns like managed retirement accounts, Social Security, health care plans – private or public, immigration reform, or a global economy. It was all simpler back then. You could get by with the bare necessities of life. But not today.

Regardless of the particulars of 1st and 21st centuries, Jesus' teaching remains challenging, "life is more than food, and the body more than clothing." We sell ourselves way too cheaply thinking that our value, our intrinsic worthiness as human beings, is based upon these external things. We place so much confidence in food,

drink, clothing, and possessions that we fret and worry over them; they make us anxious about today, about the future.

And what does anxiety, worry, and apprehension give in return? Our first response might be “nothing.” But that would be a mistake. Anxiety takes away peace and contentment. In their place, it gives sleepless nights, a fearful conscience, high blood pressure, ulcers, and a whole host of other physical, mental, and emotional troubles. In vs. 25, Jesus asks a profound question, “And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?” The obvious answer is we can’t. And from a human perspective, prolonged anxiety may even shorten your life! And yet, we so easily live fear-FUL, anxious lives to our physical and spiritual harm.

But Jesus says, “Don’t be anxious! Your life is more than the basics, more than stuff.” You need proof, asks Jesus? Go outside and look at creation. Consider the birds of the air, the ravens according to vs. 24. They can’t plan for the future by planting crops. They fly to and fro to collect food all day long. But in the end, they are dependent upon God the Father to provide for them. They live on what is given to them. And Jesus says, “Of how much more value are you than the birds!” (vs. 24). You are created in God’s image, reflecting His glory before all creation! Your life is more than food and clothing. You are more than the biometric data supplied by your Fitbits and other electronic devises.

Need more proof? Look at the lilies of the field (vs. 27). Beautiful. Gorgeous flowers. But they don’t go about shopping for the finest silks and fabrics to clothe themselves. They don’t visit beauty salons and day spas. They are simply what God the Father made them to be. And Jesus concludes that Solomon, the most glorious, the richest, most running over the top with more toys and stuff than you can imagine type king ever to live in ancient Israel, couldn’t hold a candle to the glory of a simple lily of the field. Vs. 28, “But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the over, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!” All creation is screaming out to you and me that God will take care of us. Don’t seek these things; and don’t worry, says Jesus in vs. 29.

That’s a pretty tall order. Not worrying over possessions and the necessities of life is in short supply today, maybe in any day, ancient or modern. Worry and anxiety are characteristic of sinful unbelief; the opposite attitude of trust and confidence in God the Father is characteristic of faith and salvation. One is a virtue, the other a vice. Vs. 30–31, “For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows

that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.” Seeking earthly things is misguided. It leads to the vice of worry, doubt, and anxiety. Seeking God’s kingdom is the virtue that brings freedom, peace, and hope that transcends the basic necessities of life. Your Father loves you and knows what you need and when you need it. Seek the higher things, His eternal kingdom. And by the way, Jesus declares His Father will give the lower things – food, clothing, shelter, and maybe even a few niceties to boot – as well.

So you might pause for a few moments. What do you seek the most? God’s kingdom or the things of this world. Does the righteousness of faith lived out in all areas of life permeate your heart, mind, and soul? That certainly means going to work, earning money, and taking care of food and clothing. But do we do these things to satisfy ourselves or to serve our neighbors in love through Christ Jesus? You see, this is much more challenging than the amount of your Sunday offering.

(Excursus: offerings)

Lest we be discouraged, hear these tender words from Jesus, “Fear not, little flock! For it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (vs. 32). Your heavenly Father is not some stingy miser, begrudging the simplest necessities. His desire is to give you more than you can possibly imagine: the kingdom of heaven and all that comes with it. Over anxious concern about food and clothing robs you of higher gifts: God’s eternal kingdom. Don’t be afraid! God the Father delights in giving you His Spirit, His steadfast love, His eternal adoption into His family. All of heaven and earth belongs to you as an eternal inheritance. Your baptism is the seal of inheritance.

Knowing that the kingdom of heaven is yours by virtue of the gospel, you can now handle your possessions quite differently from the world. That’s the transformative teaching in today’s gospel reading! Look at vs. 33–34 but don’t expect to find this kind of thing on Wall Street or in any financial reports. “Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” In other words, we hold onto possessions with a very loose and generous hand. Freely we receive, freely we give. It’s all pure gift from Jesus. Because of Him, it’s simply impossible to have a net loss!!

Life is so much more than all this stuff. So be generous with it, be liberal in giving away all these things especially to the poor and needy. And with the way our culture is changing, we Christians will have ample opportunity to serve the poor, physically and spiritually. We have the greatest treasure: Jesus and the forgiveness of sins He won for us, eternal life, the Holy Spirit living in our hearts and minds, the hope of the resurrection unto eternal glory, and so much more. By serving the poor and needy in Christ's name and with His love, we are storing up treasure in heaven. That treasure cannot be stolen; it cannot wear out or decay away, says Jesus in vs. 33.

Christian stewardship always has one focus: using all that I possess – time, money, food, clothing, relationships with family, friends, and strangers, house and home – so as to reflect and demonstrate that my treasure is in heaven; that is, with Christ and the world He saves through His life, death, and resurrection. God the Father knows all the things you need. And it is His good pleasure to give you His eternal kingdom.

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life...Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you...For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

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

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.