

Epip. 8 2011

Matt. 6:24-34 “God Knows What You Need”

We all would like to live a care-free life where we are not enslaved by bondage to toilsome labor, excessive demands, unreasonable expectations. When God created the world for Adam and Eve the Bible says He placed them in a garden. God placed us in a world that can be as beautiful and productive as a perfect garden. That’s what God intended for us in the creation. We are the ones who have made the world a place of toil and tears, a world where we give up our freedom to enslave ourselves in addictions to work, wealth & worldly pleasures. God created us to be free and to live in relationship with Him which is true freedom. Yet, we pursue the things of the world over relationship with God. The world sets before us what appears to be freedom but in reality is only slavery disguised as freedom. Jesus says that seeking first a relationship with God is the true path to freedom. That’s the backdrop for today as we look at this text for the last Sunday of the Epiphany Season.

This text for today is not a call to relinquish or renounce anything. Rather, Jesus sets before us contrasting options when it comes to living in this world. He urges us to choose freedom, and tells us how to take the first steps toward the only real freedom there is, namely seeking first a relationship with God.

Our natural tendency is not to seek relationship with God first. Rather, our natural tendency is to see life in this world. But life in this world is tenuous at best, ultimately futile at worst. Life in this world produces anxiety. Jesus knows this. Six times in these verses Jesus says, “Do not be anxious” or “Do not worry”. RIGHT. Like that’s a possibility in this life. We worry every day about many things. We worry about the economy, the price of gas hitting \$5, we worry about our children when they are sick or about how they are doing in school. We worry about our friends and family members who are unemployed or facing trouble. We worry about the future. Worry is part of life.

So when Jesus says, “Don’t worry” we probably think, “What’s he been smoking?” Of course we worry – we’re human! But remember, we are in

the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus speaks with authority. So it would be wise for us to pay attention to what Jesus is saying here as well.

We get some clues to what Jesus is talking about if we look at the first verse and the last verse that bracket this text. The text ends with Jesus saying, “Do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day’s own trouble be sufficient for the day.” The problem of anxious worry is that it is borrowed trouble. Worry is mostly futuristic, meaning it is “tomorrow-centered”. As such it is often unrealistic and wasted energy. We don’t have tomorrow. We have only today. Tomorrow’s worries will be here tomorrow so don’t spend excess energy worrying about them today. And even more important, worrying about tomorrow takes the focus off today, the duties of today, the joys of today, the relationships that need tending today. That’s how the text ends.

The text begins with Jesus saying, “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” That’s the key verse. The kind of master you choose will determine if your life is filled with anxious worry and fear or filled with joy, wonder, and gratitude. Two masters are set up against each other... God and mammon. Mammon means simply wealth or possessions. Two masters. One is finite the other infinite. One offers a false freedom while the other gives true freedom both now, in this life and in the life to come.

Jesus talks about divided loyalties and the natural consequences of choosing poorly in this life. “No one can serve two masters.” The first thing we note is that Jesus doesn’t say that we are “masters ourselves”. We think we are masters of our own destiny, but not according to Jesus. Luther said it this way, “Man is a donkey to be ridden, either by God or by Satan”. Free will is a spurious term when it comes to theology. Our wills are enslaved either to God or to that which is not God. The term “master” can also be translated “Lord”. A “Lord” is one who commands you, who demands loyalty, allegiance and worship. If your master is money watch out. It is easy to become enslaved to it. Because we worry about tomorrow we willingly give ourselves over to the slavery of securing wealth. But wealth is not God and as such it cannot secure the future and so even as we pile up more and more things, anxiety creeps in with it. We become possessed by possessions which do not satisfy us for very long. We fall victim to the malady one writer has called “the adoration of the un-possessed”.

Wealth is a finite “thing” and a false god. Being finite, wealth cannot give us life or security. Wealth cannot save you. Our daughter, Jen, wore a lapel button in college that read, “Eat right, exercise, die anyway.” Well we could add to that, “Eat right, exercise, accumulate wealth, power, position... and die anyway.” Nothing you accumulate in this world will save you and you can’t take it with you. Jesus told a parable about a rich man who filled up his barns with crops and said to himself... “Self, you have much wealth saved up for many years. Take it easy, eat drink and be merry. But God said, You fool, tonight your life is demanded from you.” (Lk. 12:16-20). If wealth becomes your master then the natural consequence will be worry. It doesn’t matter how much wealth one has, it never seems to be enough. You worry about losing it. Wealth is a finite master with no ability to give you life or peace. And besides that, where the love of wealth fills one’s life there is no room for God.

You will recall the first commandment. “You shall have no other gods before me.” Luther said the definition of a “god” is anything that we love and trust above all else. If we trust in our wealth above all things then wealth is our master and we become slaves to it.

The alternative to letting wealth be our god is to trust in the true God, our creator and redeemer, our savior and Lord. To trust in the true God is to trust in the infinite one, the God of today and tomorrow. God is the one who gives us life, who loves without counting the cost, who forgives with abandon, who gives us a future. Living under this true God means we live in freedom. We do not have to worry or be anxious about this life today or tomorrow. Jesus says, “Consider the birds of the air or the flowers of the field. God provides for them. Will he not also provide for your needs as well?” God calls us to trust Him as a flower trusts the coming spring or a bird trusts the rising air current.

Jesus does not say that we need to renounce the things of this world, earning a living, having possessions. Remember that he says, “Your heavenly Father knows you need these things.” But Jesus does call us to love God first - to honor and serve God with the same kind of devotion that a slave serves his or her master. Remember Luther’s comment about us being slaves either to God or Satan. If your master is kind and good, giving you all you need for life, you serve him joyfully, faithfully, willingly. If your

master is cruel and destructive, your life will be true slavery lived out in toil, anxiety and fear.

The world around us is filled with anxiety about many things. But we do not need to be anxious or fearful. For this is also a world full of wonder with countless examples of God's abundance, provision and love. Look for these things when you are tempted to worry or be anxious. In seeing the bounty of God's provision for your life you will be renewed in faith and set free from anxious worry. This is God great gift to you.

St. Paul talked about living in the world this way, **“Have no anxiety about anything but with prayer and supplication, make your requests known to God, and the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** (Philippians 4:6) Thanks be to God.
AMEN