

Luke 12:22–32: ²²And [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. ²³For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. ²⁴Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! ²⁵And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁶If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? ²⁷Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ²⁸But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! ²⁹And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. ³⁰For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

³²“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³Sell 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. ³⁴For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Faith Is Trust in Our Trustworthy God

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

The text for today’s message is the Gospel reading from Luke, the 22nd chapter (a change from the bulletin).

INTRODUCTION

We’re in the dog days of summer, when the heat and humidity drag on, and being outside is rather unpleasant. This is a time when it feels like nothing really exciting is happening. We’re in the dog days of the Church year, too. The Pentecost season drags on in the same old routine—there’s nothing to celebrate until Reformation Sunday.

It's that way with the Christian life, too. It goes through dog days, as well. Times when it feels like nothing spectacular is happening—when things seem overly routine—when it feels like God isn't there, or He doesn't care, or He isn't doing anything great in your life.

The temptation is to lose faith when you don't see God at work—especially when things aren't going your way. Today's readings from God's Holy Word encourage you not to lose faith during these dog days because God doesn't have to be dramatic to be working in your life. In fact, faith trusts that God is working, that He is there, that He does care. Faith is the knowledge that God is active in your life, even when He doesn't seem to be there.

Well, what is faith? How would you answer that question? The writer to the Hebrews opens today's Epistle reading with this definition of faith: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

That's the Biblical definition—and thus the correct definition—but it's rather abstract. Let's dig in a little deeper into that word faith.

Last week's Gospel reading was the Parable of the Rich Fool. What did that rich man hope for? Comfort. Security. A long life. Where did he find what he was hoping for? It's pretty easy to see where his heart was—in bigger barns, in earthly security. That meant that his conviction was in things seen. He put his trust in bigger barns. It seems to me that conviction and trust go hand in hand. If you didn't trust that Hillary Clinton would be a good president, would you have a lot of conviction about her?

What do you hope for? Do you hope for health, wealth and security? Into what then do you put your trust? Your jobs, medicines, pension plans, or the government? If this is where you put your trust—if this is where you want to see God working, do you then worry about these things? Why do you worry? Is it because these things are fickle and fleeting and untrustworthy?

We put our faith—our trust—in a lot of things—and hope they do great things for us. But what does true faith say? Well, let's change that verse from Hebrews just a little: "Now God is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ knows that in this world of sin, God alone is faithful, God alone is worthy of your trust, and that God is always working in your life.

3. God is working in your life everyday.

Because God is worthy of your trust, Jesus follows the parable of the Rich Fool by saying, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. ²³For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing." As true man, Jesus knows the human condition. In this broken world, sinners put their trust in things they see. And because that's where we put our trust, we worry about things like food and clothing—and where we'll get the money to buy them.

The rich man was a fool because he trusted those bigger barns—and not God. He was prepared for a nice, comfortable earthly life, but he wasn't prepared for eternal life. So, as an example of trust in the heavenly Father, Jesus point to the ravens: ²⁴Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! ²⁵And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁶If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?" The ravens appear to be wiser than the rich fool!

The raven is an interesting bird. You see them by the side of the road quite often because they're dining on road kill. That's what they do—they are nature's garbage disposal system. They don't plant or harvest, they don't have barns—yet God takes care of them!

In evolutionary thinking, human beings are no different from the animals—we're just a higher order of evolved organism. But in Biblical theology, human beings are special. We're the crown of God's creation. Adam was hand-built by the divine fingers of God from the dust of the ground. And He hand-built Eve from Adam's rib.

So, of how much more value are you than the birds? If you evolved, you're just a sack of protoplasm destined to die and rot and become fertilizer for the grass of the fields, and maybe even food for the ravens. But as a special creation of God, you're valuable to Him.

Now, you can measure the value of something by how much you're willing to pay for it. And what did God pay to redeem you from your sins? Jesus didn't become a human being to die for the birds and the grass—He became a human being to die for you. The price that God was willing to pay for you was the precious blood and the holy and innocent suffering and death of His beloved Son. That's how much God values you—thus Paul says, “[God] who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Rom. 8:32).

If God gave you Jesus, will He not also provide for your daily needs? Does He not provide for your daily needs? When you're looking for God to do great and exciting things during the dog-days of life, then look here ... what greater thing could God do for any of us than what He has done in Jesus. There's nothing better or richer or more powerful that God can do for you than give you Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins.

2. Worry—the lilies and the grass

But Jesus isn't finished with His illustration. He next addresses worry: “²⁵And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁶If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?”

We put our trust in things that we think will give us comfort and security—things like finances, health, and the political process. Because we count on these things, we worry about them. But worry is a plague. It's highly destructive to mind and body. Headaches, ulcers, gastrointestinal difficulties, depression—even family strife—all come about because of worry. And for what? Can you name one thing that you can change by worrying about it?

And bad things happen when we worry. Power corrupts because those in power worry about their power—and will do anything to keep it. There's infighting in the home and in churches because people worry they're not getting what they want. People hoard and refuse to share because they're worried about the future.

If only we could hand over our worries to God and let Him take care of them. But why don't we? Is it perhaps because we trust what we can see, and not what we can't see? Do we worry because we can't see God divine concern for us? Jesus addresses worry by showing that God is capable of taking care of your every need and handling your every concern: ²⁷“Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ²⁸But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! ²⁹And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. ³⁰For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.”

Again, going back to creation, if God clothes the lilies, will He not take care of the crown of His creation? Unbelief says He won't—that He isn't even there. But faith is the assurance that He does indeed care for you—He always has and He always will! Faith is the conviction that God is always there for you—even when you don't see Him!

1. Free from worry; free to serve.

Then Jesus goes on to say, “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³Sell 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. ³⁴For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

The Fall into sin took our humanity away. What I mean by that is that we became concerned only about ourselves and our security and our power—we became lovers of self and not God and neighbor. Our fellow human beings became something that we used and abused for our own gain—that’s inhumanity. But by giving us faith thorough His Word and Sacraments, Jesus has made us a new creation. He has restored in us the image of God, and has directed our hearts toward heaven and God our trustworthy Father. In so doing, Jesus has made us human again by filling our hearts with love for God and love for neighbor.

With your humanity restored by the power of faith in Jesus Christ—you’re freed from the tyranny of self with its worries and obsessions—you’re freed from the enslaving fear of the devil and the world—and you’re freed from the belief that life is measured by your possessions.

Your faith in Jesus gives you assurance and conviction that not only has God opened heaven to you, but that God cares for you and provides for your every need of body and soul—even now in this life, which means you’re free to be truly human again—to see that wisdom isn’t found in building bigger barns, but using your God-given resources to help others, because you know that God is taking care of you—just as He does the ravens, the lilies and the grass in the field!

“SO, FAITH IS THE ASSURANCE OF THINGS HOPED FOR, THE CONVICTION OF THINGS NOT SEEN,” BECAUSE FAITH OPENS YOUR EYES TO SEE THE VERY REAL LOVE AND CARE OF THE ONE TRUE GOD WHO MADE YOU AND GAVE YOU HIS SON TO REDEEM YOU.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.