

Mount Olive Lutheran Church  
5327 W. Washington Blvd.  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53208-1798

The Second Sunday after Pentecost  
May 25, 2008  
Matthew 6:24-34

*“First Things First”*  
by Pastor Mark E. Wangerin

Introduction

Welcome to the Green season (No I am not color blind! Because of the ordination today [tomorrow] of Chuck Ferry our paraments are red today) – But this week after Pentecost and Trinity Sunday is the start of the non-festival portion of the church year—the time of the church. And what better way to start the time of the church than to listen to a sermon. It is not my sermon that we need to listen to today, but it is the sermon of Jesus. The Gospel lesson for this week is a part of the sermon on the Mount which our Lord preached and taught on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. And it talks a lot about worry and anxiety—at the same time it also reminds us to put first things first. And that will be our emphasis for today as we let Jesus speak to us in the words of his sermon. It is our prayer that the Holy Spirit would let us seek the “First Things First”

Anxiety

It might be an understatement to say that we are living in an age of anxiety. So it may be a little disquieting to hear Jesus say: “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious ...” Who here today can say that they have no anxiety about anything? It is apparent that people are anxious about costs (especially of gasoline) about their futures. People wonder about their retirement. They wonder about their health. They are concerned about their children or their parents. There is almost a never ending list of things to be anxious about. Some of the most prescribed medications in our land are anti-anxiety pills. Yet in comparison to other places we are so blessed and prosperous. The pictures of the earthquake victims in China are a sobering jolt into the reality of tragedy. The reports coming out of Myanmar about the typhoon there are just as distressing. Yet there we do not know as much because the repressive government of that place would keep as much information as possible quiet. Those are big problems. And there is understandably much worry and anxiety there.

But Jesus makes it simple in our text. He says, “Don’t be worried about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or what you will put on?” He speaks about the basics doesn’t he? The basics of human life: food, drink, and clothing. Indeed he asks, “Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?” Good question. And then he puts it all in perspective.

The Perspective of Birds and Flowers

Jesus talks about the birds and the flowers. “Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.” Thinks of the

thousands, no the millions of birds just like that. They are not interested in the future price of corn or wheat. They are not even interested in the harvest. The good Lord provides for them.

Several weeks ago, my mother hung a feeder for gold finches outside her kitchen window. It had not been up all through our long cold and snowy winter. Within just a few minutes, the finches were there, plucking at the seeds, just as if it was always like that. It was really rather remarkable. How did they know? You may have similar experiences. Watch the birds. Hear them fill the air with song. And hear the word of Jesus, "Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?" Of course we are of more value, for we are the part of the creation that bore the image of God, and which though it was horribly damaged by sin, it still evident in us, God's most creative and most communicative creatures. For indeed worry will not lengthen our lives, though there is probably plenty of evidence that anxiety can shorten it.

And Jesus is not finished. Now he wants us to consider the flowers. "And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, 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." Once again Jesus would turn our attention to the creation. To the flowers of the field. We have just passed through one of the incredibly beautiful times of the year as the flowering trees of spring have again put on their fashion show. Think of the colors and the hues, the thousands of blossoms, now so many of them falling to the ground. And it is true, no one of the fashion models of our society, no designer of clothes, can come near to the beauty of the flowers. Jesus uses the example of Solomon, the wealthy king and says he was not clothed in any way like the flowers of the field. But even the flowers fade away. Listen some more, "But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?" What a word from our Lord. He speaks to his disciples here but he is speaking to us as well—our faith which should be so strong is often so little. And then he concludes this portion by summarizing it all: "Therefore do not be anxious, saying, what shall we eat? Or what shall we drink? Or what shall we wear? For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all." There is where we should put our hope and trust, in our Father who is in heaven.

### Seek First

Then Jesus gets to the verse which is really the center of the thought of this text. "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Seek his kingdom. Seek his righteousness. Things which on the surface have nothing to do with what most people would consider important. But these are the things of life both now and eternally. Seek the Lord, seek his righteousness. In the book of Jeremiah, that is his name, "The Lord our righteousness." The words of St. Paul in the Epistle for today fit here very well: For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to

everyone who believes.” Jesus Himself is our righteousness. The good news, the Gospel, the message of Jesus Christ, who died for our sins and rose for our justification is at the heart of the matter. And that Gospel is the power, the dynamite, the source for our lives. God made him, who had no sin, to be sin for us, that in him we might be made the righteousness of God. And so as Paul concludes the Epistle for today, “In it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’ Why then be anxious. Keep first things first.

See how the Epistle and the Gospel are linked together—for when we seek His kingdom and his righteousness by faith we are truly the children of the heavenly father.

In the coming days, take the time, listen for the song of the birds. Look at the flowers and the trees. We are in the green season, look at the freshly growing grass. The Lord who created those things in all their beauty has created you as well. He is your loving father and in Christ who is our righteousness we live by faith.

My heart with joy is springing  
I am no longer sad.  
My soul is filled with singing;  
Your sunshine makes me glad.  
The sun that cheers my spirit  
is Jesus Christ, my king.  
The heaven I shall inherit  
Makes me rejoice and sing.

In Jesus’ Name. Amen.