

²²Jesus said to his disciples, “For that reason I tell you, stop worrying about your life, about what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. ²³Certainly life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing. ²⁴Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap; they have no warehouse or barn; and yet God feeds them. How much more valuable are you than birds! ²⁵And who of you by worrying can add a single moment to his lifespan? ²⁶Since you are not able to do this little thing, why do you worry about the rest? ²⁷Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. But I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory was dressed like one of these. ²⁸If this is how God clothes the grass in the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, how much more will he clothe you, you of little faith? ²⁹Do not constantly chase after what you will eat or what you will drink. Do not be worried about it. ³⁰To be sure, the nations of the world chase after all of these things, but your Father knows that you need them. ³¹Instead, continue to seek the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added to you. ³²Do not be afraid, little flock, because your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom. ³³Sell your possessions and give to the needy. Provide money bags for yourselves that do not become old, a treasure in the heavens that will not fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Peter was nearing retirement. After decades of hard work, he had built up a little nest egg of money, spread out over an IRA, and 401k, and fully paid off house. His plan was to sell his house and move closer to his kids out-of-state when he retired. But then the 2008 financial crisis hit. All those accounts he depended on for retirement had a big chunk gouged out of them. His home value dropped to the point that he no longer could sell it. And what was worst of all, the crash cost him his job, as his company was forced to gut its work force to be even a little profitable. Peter was trapped. He had spent his career as a wise investor, but when he needed them most, his investments were not paying off.

Last week, Jesus addressed a man demanding his brother share an inheritance, warning against greed with the parable of the rich fool. Jesus then says this: “For that reason I tell you, stop worrying about your life, about what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. Certainly life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing.”

Of course, it’s one thing to say this. We can certainly say that we don’t care much about how much stuff we have. But it’s quite a bit harder to actually do it. Every one of us has worries in life. Every one of us has concerns about things not going our way. And while I’d usually give examples, I probably don’t have to this week. You know what you worry most about. And what does it show about us? It shows that we often reduce our lives to filling our stomachs and having enough to get us through the day.

So, Jesus gives us two examples to quell our worries. He shows us the raven, a scavenger bird that does not make plans and live a hyper-organized life. It finds and eats. But God provides dead carcasses on the side of the road for the raven. Now Jesus says, you are much more valuable than a bird. If God gives ravens berries on the bushes and hedgehogs on the highways, does he not also give you what you need to survive?

He then shows the wildflower. It does not put in the fifty- or sixty-hour work week. It just lives and grows. And even without all that work, God makes the flowers beautiful. Jesus again tells us that we are more important than flowers, and if God gives the flowers beauty and vibrancy, will he not also give us what we need and so much more?

We have all these worries in life, and we forget that it's God's job to take care of us. Will he let us starve to death? He hasn't so far. Will he heal us of our sicknesses? Why do you think he fills our lives with so many healthcare workers? God takes care of us, and worrying about whether he will continue to do this is not only foolish. It's also unhealthy, both physically and spiritually.

The food on your table and the shelter overhead come from God. And before you say, "I don't see his name on the credit card or on my mortgage," remember who it is that gives you the strength and ability to work. Remember who it is that sends the rain down on the crops and gives your neighbor those important skills that help care for you in the still-complicated economy of our little U.P. community.

And if it's God in control of all these little things, and we are ultimately not in control, why should we worry about the big stuff? Why should we worry about all the things the news tells us to worry about? Why should we worry about our retirement accounts or the upcoming doctor's appointment?

Just as Jesus says, God does feeding and clothing. This is what he's about. But does he stop at feeding and clothing your body? Of course not! He feeds your soul with his always-nutritious word. He literally feeds you with bread and wine, which when his word is applied with it, is miraculously his body and blood, given for you for the forgiveness of sins. He clothes you in the righteousness of Christ in the waters of baptism, so now when the almighty God looks at you, he doesn't see all the filth of your sins. He doesn't see all your worry. He sees Jesus' perfection in your place. You see, God feeds you and clothes you with everything you need for life here on earth. But he also feeds you and clothes you with everything you need for life eternal.

The problem of worry isn't just about a lack of trust toward God. It's also about a misplaced love for the things of this world. As sinners, we often don't just worry about life and twiddle our thumbs. We try to soothe our worries. We chase after those things that we think catching will finally put a stop to all of our worries.

We're in good company when it comes to this problem. Everybody's chasing after security and calm. A few more dollars on the paycheck will finally give us financial security and freedom. A couple more shed pounds will finally give us the confidence we need to look at ourselves in the mirror without regret. We chase what we think will make us whole. And while there's nothing wrong with wanting to take care of your body or work hard to get a raise, there is a huge problem when these become the things we are most invested in, when these are the things we chase after in life.

And if we're invested in the things of this world, it means we're not invested in the things of God. You can only have so many lines in the water. You can only make one thing your top priority. Sadly, our relationship with God slides down the list, and the top spot gets held by these things we think will put us over the top and finally give us the good life.

But our Lord knows what the good life is far beyond what we imagine and believe. Beyond economic prosperity, health, and stability in relationships, he tells us that the good life is found in the kingdom of God. This kingdom is not built upon our accomplishments. It does not rollercoaster up and down like the stock market. It's his kingdom of perfection in heaven. It's his kingdom of promise and hope here on earth. Jesus tells us to seek this kingdom.

But then new worry sets in. How do I seek this kingdom? How do I invest my heart into it? Do I have to keep the Ten Commandments? Do I have to really love God and love my neighbor? Because if I'm being honest, no matter how hard I try, I'm not going to get there. "Seek the kingdom of God," Jesus says. But how do we do that?

Listen to what Jesus says next: "Do not be afraid, little flock, because your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom." On the one hand, we are supposed to seek the kingdom. But contrary to what we think at first, the kingdom of God is not one we need to find. It's given to us by God, freely and fully, through faith. This means seeking the kingdom is not searching it out. It's keeping hold of it. It's making sure this gift of God never slips away.

How do we do that? Well, Jesus gives us the harsh details: "Sell your possessions and give to the needy. Provide money bags for yourselves that do not become old, a treasure in the heavens that will not fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys." Divest your heart in the things of this world and in their worldly purposes. Don't see your money simply as a tool to buy everything you could ever want. See it as a tool to serve God, taking care of yourself, your family, your neighbor, and returning to God a portion of what he's given you. Invest in what does not wear out and what cannot be taken. Use all that you have with the kingdom of God in mind.

Jesus ends this section with these well-known words: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." At first, these words almost seem backwards. Shouldn't it be, "Where your heart is, there your treasure will be also"? But what you treasure shows a lot about your heart.

The mom who sends her son down state for college might keep an eye on the weather and news down there, not because it affects her, but because it affects her treasure. And where her treasure is, her heart is there too.

Well, if what you have stored up in heaven is your treasure, isn't that what your heart is going to be focused on even more than your kids or your retirement? And if your treasure is safely in heaven, what will you do with the earthly treasures that God loans you on earth? You will use them to serve his kingdom. You will take care of the poor, so that they see Jesus through your actions. You will raise your children to know that the highest aspiration in life is a life lived close to Christ. You will cherish your time, understanding that each moment is from God and comes with the purpose of glorifying him.

Do not invest in worry. God will take care of you. And do not invest in the worldly around you. Use all that God has given you in this world to focus on his kingdom of grace, a kingdom won for us at the cross. Because in this kingdom, you are richer than anyone could imagine. Amen.