

Luke 12:22-40 (NRSV)

He said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. [23] For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. [24] Consider 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! [25] And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? [26] If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? [27] Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. [28] But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you--you of little faith! [29] And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. [30] For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. [31] Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

[32] "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. [33] Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. [34] For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

[35] "Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; [36] be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. [37] Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. [38] If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.

[39] "But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. [40] You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

WORRY ABOUT FOOD

What do you worry about? Do you worry about what you are going to eat for supper? We do that at our house.

“We can’t eat out again tonight. It’s getting too expensive. Let’s fix something at home ... What’s that? We haven’t been to the grocery store in a week? I’m tired of always being the one to cook!”

Does that sound familiar? “What’s for supper?” is the question on everyone’s mind, and that’s reinforced by the ads on TV. “Let’s eat Outback tonight.” And we say, “Sounds good to me. Let’s go.”

Count the commercials in a one hour period that have to do with food, and I think you’ll be amazed. We’re worried about what we will eat. Food is not only a source of pleasure but also a source of anxiety. Just ask Kristy who has lost untold pounds on the Jenny Craig plan.

In Jesus’ day they were worried about food because they didn’t know when they would get their next meal. In our day we’re worried about food because we get too much of it. But, we’re still worried about what we will eat. We as a society are fixated on food.

WORRY ABOUT CLOTHES

Many of us are worried about what we eat because that affects the clothes that we can wear. Another commercial shows a young lady eating yogurt each day so that she can slip into that yellow polka-dot bikini that she has hanging on the wall. Jerrod eats Subway Sandwiches so he can wear slimmer pants. If he can lose weight by eating sub sandwiches, it makes you wonder what he was eating before!

We are often consumed by the mundane questions of life. We always want to know: “What shall we eat? What in the world shall I wear tonight?”

A member of our Bible study noted that on the Home and Garden network when someone was thinking about buying a home that was built in the 1930s; they always found the closet space inadequate. The real estate agent would explain, “Back then people didn’t have as many clothes as we have today. You’ll have to update this house by building bigger closets.”

Building bigger closets sounds a lot like building bigger barns to me. Do you remember last week's lesson? The man who built bigger barns to hold a bumper crop found out that his priorities were in the wrong place.

More stuff didn't mean a thing when he came to the end of his life. In fact he wasn't prepared at all for the really important things of life. Bigger barns weren't the answer for him, and bigger closets aren't the answer for us!

LIFE IS MORE THAN FOOD AND CLOTHES

Continuing on that theme today, Jesus tells his disciples that they shouldn't be overwhelmed by the details of life. What we eat, what we wear, the car we drive, the home we live in are just not as important as we make them out to be. We're often worried about all these things and more.

But, contrary to what the world might tell us, we are not defined by these things. We are more than the house we live in. We are more than the car we drive. We are more than the food we ate for supper. We are more than the clothes we wear.

Christians can say that because we believe that our worth is not defined by how much we have or by what we do. Our lives are defined by the grace of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

NATURAL EXAMPLES

Jesus told his disciples to look around at the beauty of nature. See how the ravens are given more than enough food to eat in their natural environment. If God feeds the birds, won't He give you enough to eat as well?

Think about the wildflowers in the field. They don't fuss over their appearance in front of a mirror. But, the beauty of their color is breathtaking. They rival King Solomon in all his glory.

If the Creator can do such wonderful things for the birds of the air and the flowers of the field, how much more will He do for you? Don't you think that you are worth more than birds and wildflowers?

We all know this passage. We have been told many times that our worth is not determined by how much we have or how we dress. But, though we have heard the message many times, we apparently have a hard believing that message.

WORRIED ABOUT THE DETAILS

We are so worried about the details of life that our life becomes too trivial. And that diminishes our true worth. We turn ourselves into consumers of goods and services instead of children of God. And that makes us very anxious. We worry about the details of our life instead of really living in the way that God would have his live.

A local retirement village advertises the promise of “care free living.” That sounds so good that many people sign up to stay there.

But, do you know what happens? A lot of people find something to worry about even though the details of daily living have already been taken care of. They have a hard time making the adjustment to worry free living. They’re used to doing that for themselves!

And the same is true in our spiritual lives. We say that we believe that our lives are in God’s hands. That sounds good to us. We like to talk about being God’s children. Almost every week in this church we talk about the gracious and loving nature of God.

But, if we believe that, then why are we still so worried about the minutia of life? What’s that old saying? “Don’t sweat the small stuff.”

And when you come right down to it, much of what we worry about is small stuff. Our lives are often ruled by the fear of what might happen. Instead of standing on the promises of God we lean on structures that are much less stable.

SINKING SAND

In the heavy winter rains of 2005 California was hit by a number of devastating mudslides. Many homes were swept away by rivers of liquid earth as hillsides gave way to the drenching rains. One treasured home, built at the cost of two and a half million dollars, sat upon a concrete pad that floated slowly over a moving glacier of mud.

Over the course of the week, neighbors and new broadcasters watched the slow creaking destruction of this marvelous home. Inch by inch the mud crept down the hill, pulling the house to pieces in agonizing, slow motion destruction.

One can only imagine how much time and effort this family put into building this dream home in a prime location. But, now this treasure was stolen away in a moment. Their dream turned into a nightmare.

When I think of this event, the words to a hymn come to mind. “On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand. All other ground is sinking sand.”

Today’s lesson teaches us that the things that cause us worry and concern are not that important. They are temporary. Even the most substantial and beautiful home will not last forever. But, God’s kingdom will last forever, and it is the pursuit of God’s kingdom that will bring us the comfort and salvation that we really need.

In the book of Romans the apostle Paul asks an important question, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” Or to put it another way, “If our lives are in God’s hands, isn’t that all we need to know?”

PUTTING DETAILS INTO PERSPECTIVE

More than that, worry is counter productive. In verse twenty five of today’s lesson we read that we cannot even add one hour to our life by worrying about things. Indeed, there is quite a bit of evidence that we can subtract time from our lifespan by too much worry.

Now don’t misunderstand. Jesus is not saying that we should be irresponsible. The questions about what we shall eat and what we shall wear

and where we will live all have to be answered. We have to pay our bills on time. We need to pick up bread and milk after work.

We need to pay attention to the details of life. The details are important. In business they talk about doing our due diligence ... that is checking out the facts before making a decision. That's a good idea. In some respects the details are often a very important part of life.

But, don't be fooled. The details are still details. The details are no substitute for real life.

PRIORITIES

We need to have a sense of priorities. We need to ask ourselves: What is most important in our lives and what can sometimes wait until tomorrow? What is our purpose in life? What needs to be the guiding principle in our life by which all other things are judged?

Jesus made it plain when it came to priorities. He said, "Seek God's kingdom first and all these other things that you need will be given to you."

I don't know about you, but I have had to learn and relearn this over and over again. It seems like I am always getting off track when it comes to my priorities. I get worried about the details of housekeeping and forget the importance of a home. I'm more worried about what I'm having for lunch than consuming the bread of life. Instead of standing on the promises of God I tend to rely more on my own ideas and understanding ... often with disastrous consequences.

I think we all struggle with this. What we believe and what we do often do not match up. How can we seek God's kingdom first and trust God to provide everything else that we need?

I think that old Chinese proverb might point the way, "The longest journey begins with a single step." The same is true when it comes to the kingdom of God. We need to take that first step of faith.

We often panic when we hear a commandment like Jesus gives us today. He tells us to “sell our possessions and give alms” and we hit the panic button. We think that that we can’t do without even one of our prized possessions.

But, I have found that many people find that selling some possessions is not as bad as they had thought. In fact, it can be quite liberating to take that first step toward the kingdom and away from our preoccupation with the things of this world.

CLEAN HOUSE

Every weekday I spend some time exercising, and while I exercise I amuse myself by watching a program on TV called “Clean House”. People who have really cluttered homes invite a team of organization experts to come into their home, display their messy house on national TV, and then help them sell unnecessary stuff at a yard sale.

The proceeds from the yard sale are used to create a much more attractive home. You wouldn’t believe what some people want to keep ... even though they haven’t used it for a long time, if ever.

The entertaining part of the show is watching people struggle to part with those prized possessions in order to achieve their goal. You’d be amazed at what some people think they have to keep.

But, in the end the result is always the same. In the final analysis, people find that they are glad to sell some unnecessary things in order to have a better life. They are all smiles and wonder why they didn’t do it before.

Take that as a spiritual parable of our lesson for today. We are so overwhelmed by unimportant details that our lives resemble an extremely cluttered room. If we are to ever dig ourselves out of this mess, we have to sell some things and give up some things so that we can devote ourselves to what is really important, God’s kingdom.

Jesus said that when we do this we are storing up a treasure in heaven where “no thief comes near and no moth destroys”. Through this process of giving ourselves away in service to the kingdom, we learn what is really important in

life. We gradually wean ourselves from a love of things and develop an appetite for the things of God instead. Our hearts are changed by action, by taking that one small step toward the kingdom.

NOT A SPECTATOR SPORT

You can read all the books you can find about baseball. You can attend games at all levels of the sport. You can quote statistics and wear your favorite team's uniform.

But, if you've never played the game, you really can't appreciate baseball and the skill that is required. There is a certain joy and understanding that only comes through participation in the sport.

In the same way, in order to understand what it means to seek the kingdom of God, we've got to find a way to participate in that kingdom.

Jesus told his disciples, his little flock that they didn't need to be afraid. The kingdom of God was already theirs. It was a gift from God.

GIFTS COME WITH RESPONSIBILITY

But God's gift like most gifts carries with it a certain level of responsibility.

When I was a youngster my parents presented me with the gift of a new alto saxophone. It wasn't easy for them to buy that instrument, but they made the sacrifice for me. That gift came with responsibility.

I could only show my appreciation for that gift by practicing and learning to play to the best of my ability. If I didn't do that I was wasting their gift. I think that I took learning to play more seriously because I understand the sacrifice that went with the gift.

Perhaps the responsibility that comes with a gift is best illustrated by the following scenario. Someone decides that you need a dog. They spend over eight hundred dollars on a pure-bred Chesapeake Bay retriever puppy and give it to you as a gift.

Now this is a magnificent animal. For those of us who love dogs it is a great gift. But, do you know how much that gift will cost you over the life of the dog?

Well, there's the cost of time and affection and seeing to the needs of the dog. But, of course there is also the cost of dog food, vaccinations, vet bills and kennel costs when you go on vacation. Statistics show that the average dog owner spends over \$14,000 on its pet.

If someone wants to give you a dog, you might think it over carefully! Being a dog lover can be very costly.

But many of us think that our lives would be much the poorer if we didn't have these furry friends in our life. We are willing to make the sacrifice and make our pets a priority.

SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM

If we are willing to do this much in our pets, how much more we should be willing to sacrifice in order to receive the gift of God's kingdom into our hearts. If we seek his kingdom first, the other parts of our life tend to fall into place. And if we do not seek the kingdom first, our lives will always be cluttered and choked by an obsession with the details of life.

Jesus always made it plain that being a part of God's kingdom was not a free ride. For him it would involve a cross, and for those who would follow him it meant the daily cross of self-denial. Paradoxically the disciples of Jesus would find life not by seeking it directly but by losing it for Jesus' sake and for the sake of the kingdom.

It is the same for us.

Jesus has said that we should give to those less fortunate; we lay up treasure for ourselves in heaven by giving alms. But, how much should we give? C. S. Lewis in his classic book, *Mere Christianity* gave this answer. He wrote,

“Charity ... giving to the poor is an essential part of Christian morality ... I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid that the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare.

In other words, if our expenditures on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small.

There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditure excludes them.”

LIVING WITH ANTICIPATION

Jesus said that when we receive the promise of the kingdom it carries with it the responsibility to live with a sense of anticipation and awareness.

He used two examples. We are to live like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding. If the servants anticipate his arrival, they will be rewarded.

In the same way our daily living must have a sense of anticipation. We live aware of a greater purpose and responsibility. We do not allow the details of life to put us to sleep to what is really important.

I think this admonition is similar to those who talk about “living green” or reducing our “footprint” on the earth. Just as many people think it is important to consider how our choices affect the environment, so we should consider how our choices are in line with or are not in line with the values of the kingdom.

The second example of what it means to live responsibly in light of the kingdom is a story about a man who was robbed. Jesus said, “If the man who was robbed had known when his house would have been broken into, he would have been prepared.”

But, just as we don’t know when the thief will come in the night, so we don’t know when the critical moment in our life will come either. We have to be

ready before that moment comes. We have to readjust our priorities and prepare ourselves spiritually for the coming of God's kingdom because we don't know when it will happen.

Certainly this doesn't mean living in fear of the last days. Jesus in today's passage tells his disciples not to be afraid because the kingdom is first and foremost a gift. But, that great gift should cause us to re-evaluate everything in our lives, and it should cause us to live with our eyes wide open. Instead of just going through the motions we are encouraged to embrace that new and exciting life that is ours in Christ Jesus.

You never know when and where the kingdom comes. But, it does come. Every day the signs of God's grace are all around us.

Hear the word of the Lord, "Have no fear little flock. Seek first the kingdom and everything else will fall into place."

Amen.