

Sermon: Matthew 6:24-34 (v.24,34): “No one can serve two masters; Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money...Therefore, do not worry (do not be anxious) about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

Theme: To serve God and not to be anxious.

Goal: When we trust God, our anxieties are committed to His gracious care.

Dear Friends

Introduction: How can we not be anxious about tomorrow? All about the political and economic instability; about our health issues; about the lack of rain... Each of us has also his/her personal challenges and plans for tomorrow. I myself am facing a very anxious time in my life: My new position in Pretoria; moving from Cape Town and leaving so many friends behind; our children moving out from Brazil and facing a totally different world; travelling and more travelling; I have to finish my work on time...

Jesus knows that this is a common problem even to His children.

Therefore He addresses this teaching to us Christians. Five times He repeats: “Therefore, do not worry”, or, in another version, “Therefore, do not be anxious;” Five times!!! And He gives reasons why we should not be anxious like the pagans, just running after the daily bread to accumulate more and more riches, losing sleeping time due to worries.

I – To serve God

This is a matter of the First Commandment: *You shall have no other gods.* And Luther explains *what it means: We should fear, love and trust*

in God above all things. As in the previous Chapter of the Sermon of the Mountain Jesus highlighted the Second Table of the Ten Commandments, talking about murder, adultery and how to love our neighbor, in this Chapter He highlights the love and trust in God above all things as the way to serve Him. And He begins with the basic needs of the daily life: food, water, clothing; and we can add: shelter and friends.

Luther said that if we don't trust in God for the daily bread, how can we trust Him for the spiritual gifts of forgiveness and eternal life?

Many trust in money as the solution for everything. And they run after money day and night until life ends and they cannot take with them the money they have accumulated. Jesus calls this "idolatry": to trust in money more than in God. Of course, we need money and we work hard to get our daily bread. This is God's will and we have to acknowledge that this is God's blessing. Also, working under God's blessing is one of the ways to serve God. But it has a limit. I quote Luther about how we serve God through our work; it doesn't matter what kind of work we do: *But what does it mean to serve God? The answer is, doing what He has commanded; for just as in the world, "to serve" commonly means nothing else than to do what someone has commanded... This is the way we must express the matter, also, about serving God, that nothing else is meant than hearing what He says and gladly and diligently doing it. But what does God enjoy? Above all things, that a person should listen to Christ and accept the gospel. This is the only true, well-pleasing service we can render God... Where children now honor their father and mother, they not only honor their parents but honor and serve God, who has commanded this. Where a husband loves his wife, and wife is subject to her husband, and each is faithful to the other, rule their household and treat children and servants with due propriety, they are thereby serving God... In the same way a poor servant girl has joy in her*

heart and can say My job is to cook, make the bed, and clean the house; who has commanded me to do these things? My master and mistress have commanded me to do them. Who has given them such authority over me? God has ordained this. Ah, then it must be true that I am serving not only them but also God in heaven and that God has pleasure in this. How, indeed, could I be more blest? It is tantamount to cooking for God in heaven... Therefore, with all his effort and labor a person can have all that is good, joy in the heart and a good conscience, because he knows that his work and labor are a service pleasing to God... For there can be no greater joy than knowing that our life and deeds are a service to God, and that God says to us, What you do for your master or neighbor, in accord with my command, you have done unto me, just as if I in heaven above were to have commanded you to do these things; for by my Word I have so ordained. (Quoted by Phil Brandt, pp. 34-36).

II – To look to the nature

Jesus not only theorizes about “do not be anxious”, leading us to trust in God above all things, but He also illustrates what He says, pointing to examples of the nature. “Look at the birds of the air... See how the lilies of the field grow.” Do they have any concern about tomorrow? And God takes care of them all. “Are you not much more valuable than they?” “If that is how God” cares of birds and flowers, “will He not much more” care of you, “O you of little faith?”

And Jesus points to us as well: “Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?” We know that we are unable, and that we are still alive by God’s grace.

The Apostle Paul adds another argument to this discussion: “If God is for us, who can be against us? He 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?” (Romans 8:31,32).

III – Priorities

I understand this as a matter of priorities. What comes first? Our concerns, worries and anxieties? Our work and efforts to get the daily bread and to accumulate money? Or our faith and trust in God, and how we serve Him? “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well”, advises Jesus. - How much time do we spend per day reading the Bible and praying? Do we even take time for this at all? How many Sundays in the month do we come to the Service and to the Holy Communion? What is so important for us that we cannot come to the church to worship our God, to receive His Word and the Sacrament, and to be in fellowship with His people? Are we seeking first His kingdom and His righteousness?

Psalm 127:2 even says: “It is vain for you to rise early, come home late, and work so hard for your food. Yes, he can provide for those whom he loves even when they sleep.” (NET version).

Conclusion: We keep the first commandment when we fear, love, and trust in God above all things. Today is a day about trusting God... we are encouraged to worship God for worship's sake, not to gain approval (Phil pp.38,39). If I am worried about my budget, does that worry actually solve the problem? Or is it in fact, being anxious, actually an impediment to me getting a good night's sleep so I can go to work tomorrow and do something productive about the hole in my checking account? Does Jesus suggest that resting in his engraved hands means that I can get that good night's sleep and he will be there to bless the morrow? I cannot tell you that it means a pot of money will fall into my lap, but I can look forward to His blessing with hope and expectation. Worry or anxiety doesn't help that. It binds me, it traps me, and it sucks away my hope.... My anxieties and fears and worries are the goad which impel me into His arms. These are all His problems. He has taken on my flesh and loves me. (P.Brandt pp.40, 44). Amen. (Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, 24 September 2017)