

Luke 12:22-34
Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
August 10, 2025

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

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. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.... All the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you."

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Last week's text hit us sinners right between the eyes and pricked us at the heart. Understanding that covetousness is tantamount to idolatry – loving and trusting the stuff (wealth, daily bread, health, family, degrees, careers, inheritance... you name it!) – loving and trusting that, to the point that we chase after it and believe the quality of our life rests in whether we have acquired it ... rather than loving and trusting the one true God... all of that was condemned by Christ last week through the parable, so that the hearer who loved his hoards of stuff was addressed by the Almighty, "You fool!" (And, in the Scriptures, the word 'fool' is used to denote one who believes there is no god... except for Self, who is served by Stuff.)

It would seem we had enough of that last week to not have to hear it again today. And yet, we come to our reading – the verses immediately following those verses from last week – and, here it is

again! “Oh no!” we think; “another pummeling from God about our love of stuff!”

Indeed, it could seem that way; in fact, it’s rare that Jesus spends so much time on one topic... so this must be, in Jesus’ wisdom, a matter of primary importance (after all, idolatry is a First Commandment issue!).

But there’s a *very subtle, very important* difference between last week’s text and this week’s text. And when we understand that so subtle, but so important difference, we begin to appreciate Jesus’ compassion, as he doubles back to this issue from a different angle. What’s that very subtle, very important difference?

Last week, Jesus’s parable was prompted by an anonymous man of society feuding with his brother over earthly inheritance. And Jesus’ response to the crowd very much focused on the world’s covetousness of mammon, it’s chasing after these things... so that the sermon last week gave various examples of our society’s idolatry and how that outside pressure impacts Christians and perhaps influences not only our way of thinking, but our very way of life.

But, this week, Jesus approaches the same topic of covetousness – loving and trusting ‘my things’ more than God – from a different angle. The text begins, “Jesus said *to his disciples...*” That’s a very subtle, but very important distinction. For his disciples are those who *do* trust God, who *do* love and heed Jesus’ word, who simply want to live by faith in God. They don’t just get offended and

stubborn-headed when Jesus points out the love of mammon; they get reflective and they see their daily life and they think, “Uh oh. Am I guilty of idolatry? I think I am! Is there any help for me? I desire what is right, but I tend to ‘live it out’ all wrong;” and they flee to Jesus and say, “Forgive me! Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth.”

In other words, the people of God hear His condemnation of covetous idolaters, and they humbly cry out, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief.”

And, because Jesus knows your heart, he now approaches the same topic from a different angle, as you can tell by his lead in, “*Therefore...*” (building on what came before it, but now to his disciples)... “Therefore **I tell you...**” How authoritative is his appeal, and yet, how gentle and compassionate... as the holy God in the flesh appeals to his dear, but admittedly, weak and confused sheep: “Therefore I tell you, *do not be anxious about your life...*”

There it is! What compassion! Jesus knows his disciples want to say with their whole heart, “Of course I love God! Of course I love His holy will and his wondrous way! Of course I know that He sent His redeemer to die for me and has saved me and won’t leave or forsake me!” The New Adam in each of us wants to always cry out with the psalmist in the refrain of the Introit that set the theme for the day, “Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; make melody to our God on the lyre!” The New Adam always wants to do that!

But, we're weak. Our idolatry of Self is still idolatry! But it is met with Jesus' gentle, but firm, sympathy... ours is not a foolish, atheistic love of hoarding worldly wealth; instead, our idolatry is seen in an anxious uncertainty about life, trusting God, but less than Self, to be mindful of me... a desperation that knows God has promised He will provide, but grows anxious and uneasy when I'm not seeing it play out in a way that assures me.

Indeed, that same anxiety even plays out in things spiritual! For example, *why* and *how* do you come to the Lord's Table today? Do you come anxious to prove to God your worth, to make Him pleased that you've actually come today... that you've thought through all the doctrine just right and now are well worthy to come... or, perhaps, anxious that you're *not* worthy, *not* well prepared and so maybe He will judge your participation?

But isn't that an anxiety rooted in you wanting to be in control, you wanting everything to play out the way *you've* planned, for *you* to control your anxieties and burdens? Instead, Jesus bids you come, trust His promises, and place your burdens upon Him. Eat and drink without price. Cast your anxieties on Him, for He cares for you. Come to the Table, not saying, "Look, Lord, I am not anxious!" But rather, come to the Table precisely because you *are* anxious. Admit your anxiety, your burden, your weakness... in other words, repent of Self and your pride and reliance upon Self. And hear and taste the goodness of your God – "This is my body, my blood... to

forgive and strengthen you... you who, like Martha, are worried about many things.”

You see, it’s not really the ‘stuff’ that is the problem. It’s the heart’s feeling of security when everything is under *my* control, and feeling of insecurity when everything is *out* of *my* control. Yes, among us Christians – anxiety! A more *mild* form of idolatry, but idolatry just the same.

In fact, if idolatry were just a matter of Stuff, as if it’s wrong to plan ahead and try to make wise, faithful decisions of bodily care for you and your neighbor, then Joseph in Egypt would have been wrong to store up barns full of food during seven years of plenty. But it’s not the stuff that’s the problem, it’s the heart; and Joseph trusted God’s Word that the food was to be used up, consumed, faithfully over seven years of famine.

How often we forget that the Lord may provide us seasons of wealth for coming seasons of famine! Would we find it reasonable if the people of God were anxious as that seventh year of famine wore on and the storehouses were almost empty? *We* might rationalize it as reasonable; *God* says it’s covetousness: “I’ve provided for you for seven fat years, six-and-a-half lean years, and now suddenly you’re going to doubt Me!” It’s trusting what I thought I had control over and see it slipping away, depleted, and used up... more than trusting the God who giveth and who taketh away. “Blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Luther reminds us that covetousness is not just sheer gluttony not yet realized; it's also the panicked heart hoping in what it can cling to. Otherwise said, in the book *Battle of the Soul* a number of us have recently or are currently reading, the author well paraphrases, "When we encounter difficulties apart from faith in God's goodness, we grasp at something – anything – in our world to assuage these *fears*."

Yes, fears... anxieties, fears symptomatic of our covetousness. So, to defend His fragile sheep from idolatry, Jesus needs to calm us. He knows we love the gospel of the cross and the promises of God. But He also knows the spirit is willing and the flesh is weak. So he must still exhort us to drown Old Adam and not let Old Adam get confident in Self when times look good, when all our investments seem to be flourishing, and life is going grand so that Old Adam says, "Here is evidence that God really loves me! I must really be righteous, without sin; everything is going well!"

And, Jesus must likewise exhort us that we also must not let Old Adam accuse or question or doubt God when times seem bleak, when our fervent efforts to use daily bread faithfully and invest it wisely for our family's benefit and even provide for those of the household of faith – when all that seems to be going south, Old Adam is quick to blame God and say, "See, He doesn't really love you or know your need." Or, "You, you need to be in control; because

God's not." Or, "You must be in sin, and God is punishing you." Old Adam accuses God in all these ways.

Instead, Jesus calmly – as a gentle shepherd – says, "Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing."

And we say, "Of course it's more than food and clothing. It's a house and cars and careers and vacations and investments... and *even little creature comforts*, because, look, Jesus, how holy I am that I don't covet house, car, career, vacation and investment, just as long as I have my creature comfort." No, that creature comfort has suddenly become your idol, hasn't it?... the security blanket without which you're not so sure God loves or remembers you.

But, of course, none of that is what Jesus meant when he said life is more than food and the body more than clothing. Instead, he says: if that were the case, then *our* life would be no *more* than that of a *raven* or of a *lily of the field*! Food, covering. And, even if that were so, do you ever worry that the wild grasses don't have what they need? Do you ever wonder where the birds of the air are going to get their next meal or their shelter? No, you don't trouble yourself with fretting over such little creatures! Thus, *so what* if you were even just a little creature! God would still take care of you.

But certainly you are of much more value to the Lord than they! Why? – because Christ died for *you*. Christ died for you who

were made in God's image and after his likeness. And if something like the Fall and your part in the guilt of it all – if *that* could not eternally separate you from the love of God because of the total commitment of Christ Jesus to your salvation and *eternal* life – then how can we allow Old Adam to question God's love for you in *this* life?

Or, as Jesus addresses our hearts – all pretzel-twisted in their anxiety over this life – Jesus addresses them with *what* comfort? – “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

Think about *that*! Christ – who still today bears the cruciform marks of His Father's good pleasure – Christ comforts you, drowns your sinful anxiety, with promises of God's commitment to your eternal inheritance: “It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

Notice, he doesn't say, “It is *the* Father's good pleasure,” but “It is *your* Father's good pleasure.” It's a subtle appeal to your baptism... and if your baptism, then safe is the inheritance of your baptism! – your share with Christ, you share in the kingdom... the kingdom that belongs to God, and He freely gives to you! How can any earthly possession or comfort compare?

So, if it's simply anxiety we wrestle with, who among us will complain, “Yes, the kingdom of *heaven*, but what concerns me is earthly stuff!” Really? The stuff of earth is more important to your

heart than your eternal inheritance?! Then that's not the weak faith's anxiety; that's bold Old Adam covetousness.

But you say, "No, Pastor. It's truly just anxiety. I rejoice in my salvation, but I can't help it; I fear things seeming out of control in daily life. Why isn't God hearing my prayer for the daily bread for which I ask? Why do I feel I need to take matters into my own hands (and break the Second Table of the Commandments) to get all I need? Is it wrong to desire a spouse I don't currently have, or children I want to raise in the faith. Is it wrong to desire a bigger house when my family is crammed into a tiny little place?" No, all of those desires can be good and faithful. And if God knows them to be best for you, He will supply them with a perfection you cannot match with all your worrying, hand-wringing, and anxious wrestling. Do you really believe that the God of heaven who so perfectly had your eternal need met in Christ Jesus will stumble over or overlook this life's need, so that you have to take matters into your own hands? Really the Second Table of the Law... all because we don't trust the First Table of the Law.

No, God doesn't so neatly separate your daily bread desires from your eternal life need. Think about that. He doesn't – as we often do – see our daily bread desires apart from how they will influence your eternal life need. He knows how the things of daily life will serve or sever faith; how they may cloud your focus and

judgment if they are granted... how they will test and exercise your faith if they are withheld.

Moreover, in a divine wisdom we cannot often grasp in the moment, His answers often impact *both* faith and life in ways we don't realize! Are you jealous of Abraham and Sarah, granted a son in old age and promised offspring that numbered the stars? – if God so miraculously cared for them in 'daily stuff', why won't he provide for you likewise? But, was such a promise just for temporal blessings, or, more!, for the eternal well-being of the Church of God? Did God not provide *for you* precisely by providing for Abraham and Sarah!... a blessing for you that you only see when your heart is "rich toward God," as Jesus said last week.

So, guard your heart and fill it with the true treasures that lead to everlasting treasures. And in that confidence of God's good will, then live each day with confidence of His provision. In Christian freedom, make your plans, labor well, and use the wisdom God gives you for daily life; and then lay your head down at night knowing that no investments will ever grow if God knows it less-than-helpful for your faith and salvation; no amount of labor will prove to God you've paved a way for yourself better than what He could have paved for you. And no amount of anxiety will sustain your days on this earth better than God will.

No, there are really only two gods: Self, with his pendulum swing of inflated ego and pride over to anxious doubt and sleepless

night; and the Triune God, with His enduring Word and promises. The former will always appear wise for today only to prove his foolishness tomorrow; the latter has already sealed in the blood of Christ the eternal good of tomorrow, so how will He now forget you in these 70 or 80 years of today? So, Lord, teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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