

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Jesus turns His attention to the disciples in today's Gospel, teaching them further about keeping their minds set "*on things that are above, not on things that are on earth,*" as we heard St. Paul exhort the Colossian Christians last Sunday. "*If ... you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above,*" Paul taught his hearers (Col. 3:1-2).

Jesus said it this way: "*seek his kingdom.*" Seek the Father's kingdom.

The first thing to notice here is that this is not a saying about becoming disciples. This is not a conversion text. Jesus is speaking to disciples who had already taken up Jesus' call to follow Him, catching men rather than fish (Luke 5:10, 27); even as Paul was speaking to believers, who by Holy Baptism had "*been buried with [Jesus] in baptism, [and] were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God*" (Col. 2:12). Christians seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Then all "*these things* — the earthly needs — *will be added to*" them (also Matt. 6:33).

Second, how well Jesus knows the human condition — that human beings worry. We become anxious about "*things that are on earth,*" like what we will eat and what we will wear and many more such things. Jesus says, "don't do it," and yet we do, because we are fallen sinners. Just because we do it doesn't make it OK. It's not. Worry is sinful. It's a sign of "*little faith.*" Repent and believe in your faithful God.

Jesus' knowledge of this common human condition bears witness to Jesus' own humanity. He truly came down from the Father's side and was made man. He took on man's weakness — our flesh (Matt. 26:41). He was born. He suckled at His mother's breast. He felt the pain of circumcision and the humility of submitting to His earthly parents. And as Jesus began His ministry, He felt the pangs of hunger Himself.

But here is where Jesus succeeded where we fail. As Jesus fasted 40 days in the wilderness, "*being tempted by the devil,*" "*he was hungry,*" Scripture says (Luke 4:2). Yet Jesus did not become anxious. His faith never wavered, though the devil tempted Him: "*command this stone to become bread*" (Luke 4:3). Instead, turning to God's word, He rebuffed Satan's feeble attempt to make Him worry. "*Man shall not live by bread alone*" (Luke 4:4).

Jesus also tells us of His lowliness on earth, saying: "*Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head*" (Luke 9:58). Yet, one never hears Jesus fret about His homelessness. He trusts in His Father's provision.

Third, Jesus reminds the disciples why they have no need to worry about earthly things — nor do we. It's because of God's great love for all creation, especially the pinnacle of creation: man himself. Jesus uses an argument from the lesser to the greater. God loves the birds and feeds them; "*Of how much more value are you than the birds!*" God loves the lilies and clothes them; "*how much more will he clothe you.*"

God surely wants us to trust Him for these things, and to pray faithfully to Him for them. Indeed, Jesus calls out the disciples for their lack of faith. But one doesn't have to be a believer for God to take care of them. God does not withhold His provision from the unbeliever. Jesus said, "*He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous*" (Matt. 5:45). And we confess, "God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people" (Small Catechism, Lord's Prayer, 4th Petition).

But, fourth, when it comes to the kingdom, faith is necessary to receive the proffered gift of the Father, the heavenly treasure of eternal life. The believer has his heart set on this eternal treasure, and waits for its fulfillment with eager expectation.

The Father offers up this gift freely, because of His good pleasure with His beloved Son. As Luther penned in his great reformation hymn: God "turned to me a father's heart; He did not choose the easy part But gave His dearest treasure" (LSB556:4). For the Father sent His only-begotten Son on our behalf to seek after the kingdom, again, not as an act of conversion, but as an act of redemption, as an act of atonement, that He might "bring to all salvation" (LSB556:5), and that, so that we through faith might be given the heavenly treasure of eternal life. "From sin and sorrow set them free; Slay bitter death for them that they May live with You forever" (LSB556:5).

This atonement would cost Him dearly as you know well, for to redeem us from sin and death, Jesus Himself would have to suffer and die. He knew it; it was His purpose for coming down from heaven, but that would bring about his own anxiety — not about earthly things, though, but about heavenly ones. Indeed, He, who did not worry about what He would eat or what He would wear or where He would lay His head, would experience the anguish of the prospect of suffering for our sin and dying for the same. On the night of His betrayal, as He prayed in the Garden, Jesus "*began to be greatly distressed and troubled.*" "*My soul is very sorrowful, even to death,*" Jesus told His disciples (Mark 14:33-34). Indeed, His agony was so great that, as He prayed, "*his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground*" (Luke 23:44).

This, too, Jesus endured for us that we, who listen to His voice and follow Him, might no longer be anxious even about death. Our Good Shepherd, who laid down His life for His sheep, exhorts us: "*Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*" Not only don't fear, but be of good cheer, for Jesus by His resurrection has opened that kingdom to you and all believers. As we sing in another hymn: "Have good cheer, little flock; Have good cheer, little flock, For the Father will keep you In His love forever; Have good cheer, little flock!" (LSB735:2)

Finally, this faith — a burning lamp, Jesus calls it — so necessary to receive the kingdom, must continuously be fueled with the oil of God's Word, lest our lamps go out, and we miss the return of our master. Let us be diligent about hearing God's word; let us also recognize that our master comes even now in hidden ways to serve His servants. Even today, He invites us to "*recline at table*" here at Zion, where He comes and serves up His body and blood and strengthens us in faith in Him and in love for others.

God grant us faithfulness to His Word and Sacraments, that, seeking the Father's kingdom thus, with hearts set on the heavenly treasure, we may not fret over our earthly needs, but trust in the Father's providence, using what He provides us also to attend to the earthly concerns of our neighbors. God grant that the master will find us, with our lamps of faith burning brightly, awake and ready when He returns in glory.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.