

**The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**July 7-8, 2012**  
**Matthew 6:25-34**

***“Anxious-Free Living”***

My family and I returned home on Saturday from a week at the beach in the Outer Banks of North Carolina, and it was glorious. We left the afternoon before that terrible wind storm came through, and watched the news reports of how much damage was done. And all of this in the midst of stifling heat and humidity! It was mighty hot down along the Carolina coast as well, but when you're at the beach worries and cares seem to melt away. The most you have to think about is "Do I want to go out and get in the water now or later?" It's easy to have that anxious-free living there at the beach with surf, sea, and sand. It's not so easy to sustain that anxious-free living when we get back home. It's back to reality with work and all of the daily challenges that go with it. We find all the bills that came in the mail while we were gone. Everything we put off during that one week of anxious-free living at the beach is right there ready to hop up in our lap when we get home. It's important to get away and have a change of scenery; to rest and relax. But how do we hold onto that anxious-free living Jesus tells us about in today's Gospel lesson? As we gather today for worship outdoors in the beauty of God's creation, Jesus' words from a portion of his Sermon on the Mount give us guidance and wisdom for anxious-free living. May the Lord's rich and abundant blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word, for Jesus' sake.

The sad truth is that we tend to be very anxious and stressed-out people. Lots of things contribute to this: the daily commute to work with long hours on the job, fighting traffic wherever you go in this area, family and health issues, the very unsettled world situation, the economy – and the list goes on and on. These things not only rob us of sound sleep at night, but also of joy in living – that full and abundant life which Jesus came to bring (John 10:10). Worry has been described like a rocking chair. It gives you something to do, but it doesn't get you anywhere. Worry shifts the focus of attention from the all-sufficient power of Christ to our own human insufficiency and insecurity. As Oswald Chambers, author of the Christian classic, *My Utmost for His Highest*, has said, "Worry is an indication that we think God cannot look after us." The Lord Jesus Christ invites us to take a look around us at the world which our heavenly Father has created and still sustains. There are some lessons for us to learn here from the birds of the air and the lilies of the field.

Jesus uses that word "anxious" six times in the span of these verses in today's Gospel lesson, so let's unpack what this word actually means. The original word here (μεριμνῶ) means worry – not just concern. There is a difference between the two. Whereas concern can tend to motivate us to take initiative and act, worry tends to decrease our initiative, leading to inaction. In short, worry can paralyze us. The original word here implies to divide and draw in different directions. And isn't that exactly what anxious worry does to us? We become divided, distracted, and drawn in a different direction – away from our heavenly Father's providential and loving care for us. And this is what becomes our downfall. Corrie Ten Boom, the well-known Dutch Christian author and speaker put it this way: "Look around and be distressed. Look inside and be depressed. Look at Jesus and be at rest." That's what Jesus reminds us of here: keep our eyes fixed on him in the midst of so many things in life that would pull us away from him. If our heavenly Father graciously and abundantly feeds the birds of the air and clothes the flowers of the

field, won't he also graciously and abundantly care for us, his children? If the Lord God did not spare the life of his only Son, but freely offered him up for us all to bear the penalty of our sin and disobedience – including all that anxious worry rooted in mistrust of God – won't he also provide for us now? My friends, we have much to learn from God's creation about anxious-free living.

Here in Lake Accotink Park's (<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/lake-accotink>) 493 acres wildlife abounds: great blue herons, Canadian geese, ducks, sea gulls, robins, swifts, swallows, osprey, owls and even bald eagles. There are red fox, white-tailed deer, beaver, snakes, toads, frogs, fish and turtles. There are also mosquitoes, flies, and gnats. Even in this terrible heat, I hope you'll take opportunity to do a bit of exploring and give thanks to the Lord God who created and cares for all of these things that are part of God's creation, just like we are. Like us, they also look to God to provide for their daily needs. We are joined together with all of creation and God has charged us to care for all of creation; to manage wisely and faithfully what belongs to him. We are stewards of God's gifts. Worshiping outside in the beauty of God's creation reminds us of this sacred calling to manage well what God has entrusted to our care. This is a good opportunity for all of us to consider how we are intimately connected and joined together with all of God's creation. We who have been created in God's own image and redeemed through the blood of Christ are called to be good stewards of the world around us. What does this stewardship look like – not only at church, but where we live and work and play? As we wrestle with issues related to caring for God's creation, the Lord God calls us to anxious-free living as we entrust ourselves, our time, and all things into his gracious hands.

Jesus' words in today's Gospel end with some profound wisdom for that anxious-free living that we all want: **“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you”** (Matthew 6:33). All these things that we tend to worry so much about: food and drink, house and home, clothing and appearance, work and leisure, money and savings. Jesus redirects us to something of higher importance and eternal significance: his kingdom and his righteousness. With this as our central focus, we can let tomorrow be anxious for itself as we take life one day at a time. With God's help, that will make for anxious-free living. Amen.