

The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
August 10-11, 2019
Luke 12:22-34

“A Non-Anxious Life”

We live at a very anxious point in time. What is it that makes you anxious? What is it that keeps you up at night: financial matters? Health concerns? Job situation? Family issues? Maybe your concerns are larger than just personal challenges; things like national and global terrorism, extreme weather patterns impacting crop production which leads to hunger, the world’s population outstripping the resources to support it. The list is endless, and the truth is that we can and do worry about many things in life. When all is said and done, what do we accomplish by being anxious and worrying? Not much. This is what Jesus is getting at in today’s Gospel lesson with the opening verse: **“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”** (Luke 12:22-23). Jesus’ words become the basis for preaching this day under the theme, “A Non-Anxious Life.” May the Lord’s rich and abundant blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word for Jesus’ sake.

Let me qualify things at the outset here and say that a non-anxious life is almost an impossibility for us. By nature, we are prone to worry, some more so than others. But everyone at some point becomes anxious about something. The number of people, including children, who suffer with anxiety-related disorders is sky-rocketing. In fact, this is the most common mental illness in our nation today (<https://adaa.org/about-adaa/press-room/facts-statistics>). So Jesus’ words about “do not be anxious” strike a nerve with many of us. We’d love not to deal with the effects of anxiety, but it’s not so easy. Most of us would really like to worry less, turning our cares and anxieties over to Jesus. He invites us to do this very thing (Matthew 11:28-30), but the challenge is that we don’t leave these cares and worries with Jesus. We are very good at snatching them back again. Why do we do that? Do we think that somehow we can control things, even alter the outcome of a situation, by our worry? If so, we are very much mistaken. In fact, Jesus tells us the opposite is true: **“And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?”** (Luke 12:25). We know this to be true from our own experience. Worry and anxiety not only do not add to our span of life, they detract from it. The mental and emotional strain leads to physiological strain and illness which does indeed take away from life as God intended it for us.

Jesus points us to two examples from the world around us: birds and flowers. Our heavenly Father cares and provides for them, and if that is true with these parts of God’s good creation, how much more true will it be for us! **“Of how much more value are you than birds!”** (Luke 12:24b). We are people for whom Jesus, the Son of the Father, shed his blood and gave his life on the tree of the cross! By our anxious worrying and fretting over things that are often outside our control, we undercut the truth of the Father’s never-ending love and care for us, his children. Jesus calls us to trust that our heavenly Father will provide for our daily needs of food and clothing, just as he does for the birds and flowers. You may be thinking: “If it were only food and clothing that I had to be worried about, that’d be a pretty good place to be.” Often our cares and worries are more complex and multifaceted. It’s not just about food and clothes, although these are real-time concerns for many, even right here in one of the wealthiest counties in the entire nation. Instead of operating from a mindset of scarcity, let us remember that we worship and serve a God of abundance, even as the psalmist reminds us: **“The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing”** (Psalm 145:15-16). Nothing is impossible with the Lord (Luke 1:37), as today’s Old Testament lesson made clear (Genesis 15:1-6). God made Abraham and his wife, Sarah, who were childless even in old age, to have offspring as numerous as the stars in the heavens. If God can do that, then he is more than able to transform our hearts and minds from worry and anxiety to praise and thanksgiving for the Father’s good gifts to us.

Jesus calls us away from things, possessions, and stuff. He calls us to order our lives differently from the world around us. The world around us tells us to seek more and more things, possessions, and stuff. Get the newest, the fastest, the shiniest! You are worth it; you deserve it, we are told. Jesus gives us a different message. Our worth doesn't lie in things, possessions, or stuff. Our worth doesn't come from our intelligence, our looks, our bank account, our skill set, or any such thing. Our worth comes from the One who fashioned and formed us; who redeemed and rescued us; who loves us and gave himself for us. Because of this, Jesus calls us to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all of these other things will be added to us as well (Luke 12:31; Matthew 6:33). Jesus calls us to an inheritance that does not become obsolete or pass away: **“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”** (Luke 12:32-34).

Some time ago, I received this little coaster as a gift. It sits on the desk in my office. Its message is simple but profound: “My worries are few because my blessings are many.” It’s a reminder to me of how Jesus our Savior calls each of us to live – not filled with worry, but filled with gratitude for his blessings. The antidote for anxious worry is thanksgiving – not the holiday in late November, but the daily giving of thanks to God for his gifts and mercies freely given to us. This attitude of gratitude serves as a corrective to the “woe is me” mentality that we can easily fall into. When we slow down and take the time to reflect on how good and gracious the Lord is each and every day, even on those days when things seem to be crashing down around us, we begin to experience a change wrought by the power of the Holy Spirit. Our worries will likely never disappear entirely, but by the grace of God they do indeed become fewer because we are intentionally looking at our lives and the world around us through the lens of Jesus. We are looking for the blessings and giving thanks for them. That changes us, and by extension, it begins to change those around us. What truly matters to us is no longer tied to transient things that rust and rot. What truly matters is the true and lasting treasure that we have received in Jesus. **“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”** (Luke 12:34).

The truth is that this side of heaven we are not guaranteed a non-anxious life. But the good news is that in Jesus, we do not have to bear this alone. The One who loves us and laid down his life for us now walks beside us every step of the way through this life, inviting everyone who is bearing burdens of care and worry to bring these to him. He promises to shoulder these burdens in our behalf, giving us strength for each day. This blessed assurance brings blessed comfort and peace which passes all understanding. Share this good news with the people in your life! Look for opportunities in the week ahead to bring a word of hope to someone who is weighed down with anxious worry. Point them to Jesus and the hope we have in him. As the closing verse in today’s psalm reminds us: **“Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in you”** (Psalm 33:22). Amen.