

Matthew 6.24-34
15th Sunday after Trinity
20 September 2020
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

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Beloved in the Lord: grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

I ran across a phrase the other day in a journal I was reading that I thought was so trenchant: “obsessing over the spoils of the future.”

The person who said it was talking about American anxieties. About what we're worried about.

We sit here in plenty of plenty, even in a pandemic. Sure, life has certainly changed for us. But for most of us the adjustments are minor. Instead of eating a hamburger at the Shack, we're eating at home.

Instead of attending large gatherings like graduation parties, we've had to be satisfied with smaller social occasions. We have to wear these things (masks).

But by and large, this pandemic has given demonstrable proof of the Lord's promises here: Do not be anxious, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and *your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.*

Your heavenly Father knows what you need. And He provides what you need. That's not conditioned in any way. There are no asterisks. It doesn't say He'll give what you need when the economy's booming, when there's no epidemic or pandemic, when you haven't been stricken by cancer. It's just a simple, straightforward promise: He knows what you need and He provides it. The pandemic has given you palpable proof of this. What you need right now, you have. Air to breathe, water in your tap, food in the fridge, shoes on your feet, your family, your transportation, and the job the Lord gave you to provide for it all.

And yet—o man—just about every conversation I have—and even the stuff I tell myself in my own head—it’s nothing but worry-wart handwringing.

How long is this gonna go on? we ask ourselves. I don’t think I can stand this *one more day!* we say. If this lasts much longer, who knows what’s going to happen—to me, to my job, to Topeka, to our church! we say.

And that—that’s “obsessing over the spoils of the future.”

You see, the Lord has written eternity into the heart of every one of us. And paradise. The Old Adam in you—he still remembers what the First Adam lost. He at least has inklings of it. And so every one of you knows that there’s something better. That’s why you make comparisons. You don’t have it now. There’s no going back to Eden. It’s gone forever. So it must be out there in the future. And in Jesus Christ, His own Son, the Lord has made that eternal paradise and blessed forever yours.

No one’s ever going back to Eden. But in Christ the Lord has created a new Eden—an entire new heavens and a new earth.

No one’s ever going back to not having been a sinner. But in Christ the Lord will bring an end to all sins and sinning when He takes you to heaven, a saint. There your past in this sinful world will be at an end.

No one’s ever going to not die. But in Christ’s death the Lord has turned even your death into a sleep, and in His resurrection He has made it the doorway to everlasting life.

That’s what’s called a rescue.

Think of your panic if you fell off a cruise liner in the middle of the ocean. You run through every scenario in your head, the good and the bad, the tragic and the happy. You hope for a log to float by an hour from now when you know you're going to start getting tired and dehydrated, or for a current to carry you to shore—some shore, even a deserted island—two hours from now when your legs are all cramped up. Your entire being is itching for that moment.

It's not here yet. But you think that by obsessing over it it'll come.

That's what life in this sin-filled world is like. You grasp and snatch at the spoils of the future—spoils you can only imagine. Many of them unreasonable. Many of them pipe dreams—winning the lottery, finding Mr. Right, getting the dream job, living in just the right house in just the right town in just the right state. But none of them a rescue.

But then just before it goes out of sight, the cruise liner lets down a Zodiac with a 200 hp engine on it. Cruise liner and Zodiac alike disappear under the horizon.

But you know. You know that someone called man overboard. You know that the crew spotted you in the water, marked the spot with the GPS, calculated wind, current, and distance between you and the liner so they know the exact spot to pick you up. And with 200 horses on board, you know that the time is coming soon. You don't need a log or an on-shore current. You just need this moment. Always this moment. Not the last moment. Not the next. Just this one. This breath. This flutter kick. This scull of the arms. And you know that what's coming isn't going to be one more day-in-day-out struggle to find water and food on a deserted island, and a random encounter with a passing ship. But after you've been checked over by the ship's doctor, it'll be a delicious cruise liner meal, a reunion with family, and a good night's sleep safe in a warm bed. It's a rescue.

Beloved in the Lord, what God in Christ has done for you is infinitely better!

In the kingdom of God and in the righteousness He's given you in the blood and miserable death of Jesus Christ, you don't have a few measly days on a cruise liner, but an eternity in the joys of heaven. Stop obsessing over the spoils of the future. You have more than you can know!

And on top of that—as if such a rescue weren't enough—He's given you His promise that He looks kindly on you. He is and wants to be your heavenly Father. He does provide and wants to provide everything you need to support this body and life. This breath, right now. This food that's waiting for you at home after church. These clothes that are perfect for the weather we're having right this minute. Even more—all of it perfect *for you*. It's what He's done every day of your life!

So what's the point of obsessing over the spoils of the future? This eternal kingdom of God that Jesus Christ won for you by His own death—it already belongs to you. You became a citizen of it and got your citizenship papers in your Baptism when you were baptized into Christ. Your citizenship is constantly being re-upped, as it were, in the Holy Church, where God richly and daily forgives you all your sins and gives you the meal of His Son's Body and Blood. The eternity and paradise that are written on your heart have been met and satisfied. Completely. What else can satisfy them? Can another job give you heaven? Can the end of the pandemic bring eternity any closer? Will wearing a mask—or not wearing it—usher in the eternal kingdom? Does it really matter what happens tomorrow if you already have an eternal tomorrow?

I know you know this.

But it is a struggle. Old Adam likes to tell you that the eternal paradise must be in this world. The allurements and concerns of this world seem to crash down on you.

But that's why God's people are people of the WORD, not of the WORLD. It's not circumstances real or imagined, present or future, that determine your reality. That's for the old creature. But you—you're a new creature in Christ. And in Christ it's His Word and His promises and the reality He has created by His blood—that's what determines *your* reality.

So seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

Amen.

pax domini, etc.

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