

Seek not things, but seek God's kingdom

Luke 12:22-40 (ESV)

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

The Word of God for our meditation comes from our appointed Gospel text, specifically, **“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”**

Let us pray:

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

Dearly beloved of the Lord,

Oligopistoi. Those of little faith. *Oligopistoi*. With this word our Lord Jesus describes his disciples concerning how they live their everyday lives: little faith. Worries for their day-to-day lives outweigh their attention to God and his kingdom. Indeed, it is one of the harshest words our Lord Jesus ever spoke to his disciples. Why does he speak this way? He speaks this way because he sees the great danger of greed and discontentment. Our Lord sees how envy and jealousy weave their way into unbelief. Our Lord wants you always to move your heart towards heavenly, not earthly treasures. With this word, *Oligopistoi*, our Lord wants to warn carefully concerning the nature of possessions, of worry, of faith, and of God.

The concern is that Christians might live their life unaware of their heavenly Father. Instead of living like ravens or like flowers, they live as if earthly things are the one thing needful. They might live their life serving money, possessions, or safety, not serving the one true God. They might exchange the fear of the Lord for the fear of lacking things. When they become overly worried whether they'll have X, Y, or Z, when they think “if only I had this much money, then everything will be alright”, then they start to serve those earthly things (i.e., become a slave to them). They begin to think that these things (food, clothing, house, money) are their true helper and true deliverer. Then, little by little, they will begin to seek the good of these earthly things instead of seeking the good of God. But, by doing this, they leave behind an unperishable wealth for the things which waste away. Our Lord corrects the disciples' thinking in two ways: he shows them the waste of fearing for earthly matter, and he shows them the riches of what the Father truly gives.

If you remember from last Sunday, Jesus taught us concerning the danger of covetousness. He told us the story of a rich man who thought his overabundance of things guaranteed him a good life. Jesus showed us in the parable that this thinking was foolish because death guarantees the end of all earthly wealth; no one can escape it. Following this, our Lord Jesus begins this week's instruction with these words, **“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on.”** Thus, Jesus is doubling down. He's

saying, “Yes, it is obvious with this rich fool that trusting in earthly things is worthless, but I want to warn you too against trusting in earthly things when you don’t have anything”. With Jesus’ words of “**Do not be anxious**” it is as though he means, “All the matters of food, of those things you *need*, forget about them. Also, those matters of clothing, of the things that bring *comfort*, forget about them too!” Everything in life – needs and comforts – should be left into the hands of God. In order to properly school you Jesus gently mocks you. He says, “Let the birds of the air be your schoolteachers, or the flowers of the field.” Those whom from the beginning of the world man was supposed to rule over and take care of have become the true teachers. Are you worth more than birds or grass? Of course! God didn’t die to rescue them, but he did so for you. Why do you act as if God had no concern over you?

If you were to say to one of those birds making sweet music to the praise of God, “How can you spend your time wasting away singing? Don’t you have investment portfolios to manage and retirement accounts to start? Haven’t you seen the stock market!?” That bird would spit on your head and be utterly ashamed of you. You who wish to be a Christian and God’s heir, you who hear his Word and his promises so abundantly, and yet do not trust that you can expect from God what you yourself cannot give without worry and greed. Does this mean it is evil to put money away or stock your pantry for the future? No, not at all. The question is: how do you react if you were to lose those items? What if your savings or retirement account were gone? Would it upend your world? Would the fear of not having enough cause you to never give any to support to those in need? Yes, then your savings has become a god and you have forgotten your heavenly Father.

Remember dear Christian, when you pray the Lord’s prayer, you always pray *Thy will be done* before you pray *Give us this day our daily bread*. You commend into the hands of your Father your whole life because you know his will is to keep you faithful until you should die. Only after that, then you ask him for the needs of today. Then you worry about the daily bread. When you pray for daily bread you also realize that God takes care of not only you who love him but also all evil people who might even curse God’s name. God waters the earth for the good and evil alike. But, by praying for daily bread (which God is going to give you anyways), you are lead to realize that God gives you everything you need and you are lead to give him thanks for it.

While Jesus calls his disciples *Oligopistoi*, those of little faith, he also tells them to not worry. He tells them that it *pleases* God to give the disciples everything. Jesus says, “**Fear not, little flock, for it is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.**” God loves it! God wants nothing more than to give you the kingdom. Yes, this is a verse to take to heart and memorize, dear Christians, to highlight and underline in your Bibles. What does it mean to be given the kingdom? It means you are under the rule of Jesus Christ. He who rules with hundreds of thousands of angels, he who rules over all earthly politicians and nations (in spite of the ballot box’s outcome), he who was raised from the dead and will never die again, is your Lord. So, you have protection and

you lack nothing. You are delivered from all afflictions because you know there is a future day when you will be raised from the dead and you will see Jesus face-to-face.

How do earthly treasures compare to heavenly ones? They compare quite poorly. Our Lord Jesus describes earthly treasures as thief-ridden and moth-perishable. Even if they were to last, how could you ever enjoy them all? You will die and you can't even guarantee your loved ones will use them wisely. Heavenly treasures instead are money bags which will never run out. Who would not like that right now? A credit card which you never pay back. Where can I find *that*? It is already yours. When you hear the words, "I forgive you all your sins..." or "Take, eat this is the true body your Lord...", you should think to yourself: "Aha! How precious to me are my Savior's words. I am securely in heaven right now and nothing can shake me. I don't know what I would do without these words. I would give up everything to hear those words from the pastor."

You have something much more secure than an earthly house or an earthly family. Yours is a heavenly city, a heavenly fatherland. The things which might seem far away, whether by time or by space, you can peer into and greet them from afar by faith. The joys and excitement of this life cannot compare to our future lives in resurrected bodies, in the immediate presence of God. With bejeweled crowns placed upon your head, within a place of serene daylight and warmth, dressed in gleaming white robes of righteousness, there is your home.

You know you have the kingdom of God. There is no need to fear things, to fear a lack of things. How you focus on fearing God instead of fearing a lack? You cut off any and every ounce of greed within your body. You turn from serving food, clothes, and money towards food, clothes, and money serving you. Instead of becoming a slave to earthly things, of being too weak to dare give it away, you, as the possessors of God's kingdom will gladly give all earthly things away. When you see someone who does not have food or necessary clothing, say "Get going, \$50; there is a poor, naked man who has nothing. You must serve him!" When there lies a sick person who desperately needs a drink, "Get up, \$20; you must go out and help him." With this mindset, you are preserved from making money your ruler and you become a true neighbor – just as shown by the Good Samaritan who had mercy.

Consider these practices to help make money your servant: regularly give to the church, leave even more money to help charities, always have cash on hand to give to those in need. God says, "**seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.**" We as a congregation are required by God to call and support whatever pastor is placed here. Yes, I know we're in a time of transition, but I praise your diligent work of trying to fill your vacancy. Continue that work and strengthen your hearts and minds to always give as much as necessary to make sure this pulpit is filled. A practice I've started to implement is every time I get my paycheck, I immediately write a check to give 10% of what I earned. The first fruits of my labor go to the Lord. Don't plan your budget with 10% giving in mind. Give the 10% then plan your expenses. Yet, this is not the only way your money can serve others. Jesus says, "**Sell your possessions and give to the**

needy". There are many organizations looking towards the benefit of your neighbors. Select one each month to support with donations and set aside that money too. We have ample opportunities within Topeka here. Come, support generously the Bargain and Bake sale which helps our Welfare fund, international missions, and TLS. Give generously to organizations such as Topeka Rescue Mission, Doorstep or God's Storehouse. These are just some ideas for organizing your monthly charitable giving. Church and charities, is there any other way to put your money to service? Of course, there is. Always have cash on you to freely give away. Give to friends or family that seem in need. Give to beggars on the street. If you are worried that they might abuse that free gift, keep gift cards on hand for restaurants or grocery stores. Give those instead. Do not expect anything in return, but gladly become the ruler over all your possessions. As Jesus said, **"It is more blessed to give, then to receive."**

Let me encourage you with two examples from your fellow Christians concerning this giving freely of one's gifts to support the preaching of God's Word and to support others. First, in the time of David the king, he was preparing all the funds necessary to build a temple for the Lord. As king, God had blessed him with plenty of money to support the building of this temple. If you read 1 Chronicles 29, he dedicates tens of millions, if not hundreds of million of dollars, to this temple. Yet, he still asks the Lord's people if they would give out of their generosity to help pay the laborers. God's people do not think, "Ah! Look at King David. He's gotten plenty of money from our regular offerings. Why does he ask for more? Does God really need this fancy of a temple?" No, they rejoice at this opportunity, and they give more than David even was able to offer, almost double David's gift. With this help, the temple of the Lord was able to be built, a temple majestic to glorify God's greatness, and a sure place where God's love for his people could be sought.

Another example of your fellow Christians giving freely is found in the early church. After Jesus' ascension and after the gospel began to spread out from Jerusalem, many Christians were selling their possessions, their houses, and their estates, to help fund the needs of the people. As it is written in Acts chapter 4, **"There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need."** This action was confirmed with God's favor. There were no needy ones among the Christians and the church continued to grow day by day by the power of the gospel. Do not think this is impossible for us here at St. John's to follow these worthy examples.

Now you might be thinking to yourselves, "Ah, Vicar. This sounds like a hard life." Yes, but Christ has warned you about leaving behind the things of this world when he said, "Come follow me." He has also given you abundant promises of blessing in this world and the next, the very kingdom of God! Christ wants you to not waver or base your life on the uncertain things of life, with fruitless worries about the future. Rather, he wants you to daily do what is right and not worry about how things will turn out, placing all worry upon God. Then you can take whatever happens to you as good and

overcome it with patience and faith. God knows what is best for you. He knows our feelings of anxiety and worry come and pass, just like the things of this world. Do not doubt God's wisdom. Anchor yourself on the one who is the same yesterday and today and forever – Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

Now may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep you hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.