



February 3, 2019

Why Jesus? Because Jesus Knows Your Heart.
Pastor Vern Christopherson

Matthew 6:19-34 NRSV

¹⁹“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²²“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; ²³but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! ²⁴“No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

²⁵“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁸And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.

³⁰But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ ³²For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

³⁴“So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own.”

I have a quick survey for you today. These are personal questions, but I encourage you to either raise your hand or give a nod if you have any worry or anxiety about these things:

That your pipes might freeze over the next time we reach 30 below?



That a sticky situation at work isn't getting any better?
That an upcoming report from the doctor will be hard to hear?
That your children or grandchildren might not always make good choices?
That the money you've saved for retirement might not stretch far enough?
And finally, that sometime soon Pastor Vern will start climbing up on ladders again?

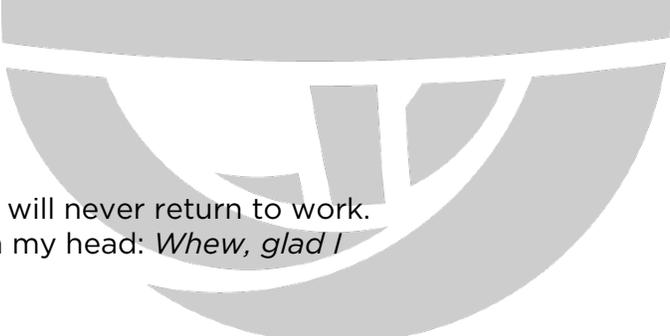
Let's be honest, there are plenty of things to worry about in life. So, what are we to make of Jesus' teaching in his Sermon on the Mount: "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink or wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?" It seems pretty clear: Jesus knows our hearts. He knows that anxiety and worry often fill up our days...and our nights.

Jesus' teaching can be quite direct: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth." When Jesus says that, it sounds like he's looking straight at us. What about our 401ks? What about the 50% off sale at Macys? Jesus is warning us about the perennial human tendency to stockpile wealth and possessions as a hedge against insecurity. The problem with investing our sense of worth in cash and possessions, he's saying, is that such an investment is never completely safe. Cash can be stolen; Cadillacs can rust; moths can eat evening gowns and dinner jackets. The "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" may fascinate us, but we need to keep in mind that they are the lifestyles of the always vulnerable. Deadbolts, safety deposit boxes, and security cameras may make us feel safer, but here's the deal: Do any of them finally protect what we really desire? Do any of them make secure a treasure worthy of our hearts?

As I see it, what our hearts really desire is to count for *something* and for *someone*. Later today the Super Bowl is being played at Mercedes Benz Stadium in Atlanta. On one of the promos, I saw numerous art pieces on display at the stadium. One of those art pieces is a saying by Rabbi Hillel, who was a wisdom teacher in ancient Israel about the time of Jesus. One of Hillel's well-known sayings is this: "If I am not for myself, then who will be for me?" We can relate to that; we need to look out for number 1. But then Rabbi Hillel adds another phrase: "If I am *only* for myself, then what am I?" That sounds more like what Jesus is telling us today: "Want a treasure worthy of your heart? Don't just live for yourself. Don't just fill up your days with worry. Don't just store up more and more stuff. Count for something and for someone."

Let me give you an example of this. Jane Ryan is a member of Zumbro. She sings in the choir. She's also employed in the Return to Work department at Mayo. Jane meets with Mayo employees who have suffered an injury or loss of some kind. Her goal is to find a way to get them back to work.

This past week I had a meeting with Jane, both because I was interested in what she does, but also because of my own return to work challenges. Jane shared a surprising statistic with me. It was about people who experience *worklessness* in their lives—that was a new word for me. If that worklessness goes on for over 12



weeks, there's a 50% greater chance that the person will never return to work. While Jane was sharing this, I quickly did the math in my head: *Whew, glad I sneaked in just under the wire at 11 weeks.*

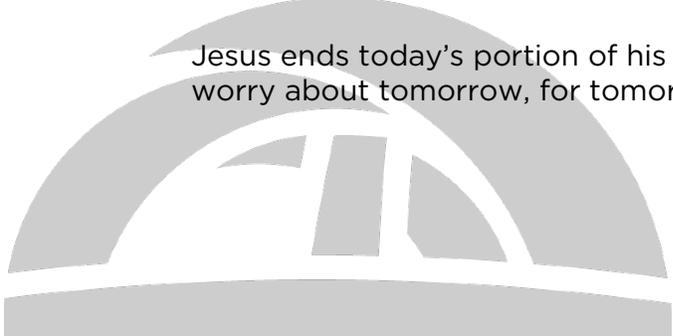
What Jane tries to do is bring confidence and hope back to people's lives. Maybe they need a new work station; some new technology; a whole new department. Jane shared an email she received from a colleague that sums up her work like this: "For what else are God's servants but minstrels, whose work is to lift up people's hearts?" What a wonderful image! It fits what Jesus is saying. When we get up in the morning, we want our lives to count for something and for someone. Far more than money in the bank and stuff in our closets, this is something worth treasuring.

Truth be told, when I hear Jesus's words about not worrying, a part of me has questions. Isn't some worry normal and good? An upcoming chemistry test or job interview is bound to cause some concern. That's a good thing, right? It helps us get ready. I don't think Jesus is telling us to blow off the test or waltz into the interview unprepared. Rather, he's speaking to the basic fear that Rabbi Hillel mentions: If we don't look out for ourselves, who will? But human nature being what it is, sometimes we never get beyond ourselves.

I have another question too. Jesus invites us, in the middle of our worry, to consider the birds of the air and the flowers of the field. "Doesn't God feed and clothe them?" he asks. Jesus' words are lovely, but they can make us wonder: Of course, birds and lilies don't worry about life, but they don't have car payments and grocery bills either.

Please know: Jesus is not comparing us directly to birds and flowers. Surely, we are worth more. Jesus simply wants us to look at them, to really look at them, and learn. The Greek verbs Jesus uses are strong. They imply more than a casual glance. Jesus wants us to imagine a world where worry and anxiety do not play a part. The mortgage might still be due, but hopefully we will find ourselves trusting more fully in God's good care. Indeed, there's nothing in this world that can take away what God ultimately provides - human dignity, a sense of worth, the confidence of being treasured in the very heart of God.

The decision to store up treasures on earth or treasures in heaven is not one of mere financial planning. It is one of basic orientation. It's about trust. Do we see what we have as not just coming from our hard work but as a gift from God? When we see life as a gift, as an outpouring of God's providence, perhaps we can be freed up to hold our possessions a little less tightly; perhaps we'll be more generous with our time and money toward others. We need our lives to count for something and for someone. And Jesus takes it one step further: "If we're looking for a treasure worthy of our hearts, we need to seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these other things will be given to us as well."



Jesus ends today's portion of his sermon with one more bit of advice: "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own." Jesus is



probably using a popular saying of his day to make a final point. He's talking about more than the chemistry test and the job interview. He's talking about more than birds and flowers. He's speaking to that deeper fear that there might be something in the future that can take away our basic worth, something finally that is stronger than God's eternal care.

I'll admit, ever since my accident in October, I've had my share of worry about tomorrow. Many of those worries have stemmed from the loss of vision in my right eye. In early December, I saw an ophthalmologist. Lots of questions came spilling out: "I'm feeling protective," I told him, "will better nutrition help my eyesight? Are their sturdier lenses I can get for my glasses? Do I need to worry about that early cataract you spotted in my eye? One by one the doctor patiently answered my questions.

Do not worry about tomorrow. Is it even humanly possible? I'd like to think so...at least some days. Maybe if we spend a little less time focused on ourselves and our problems. Maybe if we strengthen our prayer life and regularly practice gratitude for the blessings that come our way. Maybe if we commit ourselves to seek God's kingdom first, we will have more occasions to give our lives for something and for someone bigger than ourselves.

St. Augustine once said, "Our hearts are restless, O God, until they rest in Thee." Could our anxiety over tomorrow be a sign that our hearts are continuing to search for their true home and peace in our heavenly Father?

A couple of weeks after my conversation with the ophthalmologist, I was driving down to Rochester. I had a meeting with congregational leaders about a possible return to Zumbro. I left early in the morning. From Highway 52 I was greeted by a brilliant reddish, orange sunrise. I think I paid special attention because of the early morning hour and because of my eyesight issue. The sunrise was a warm reminder to me that each day - each new day - is a gift from God.

Do not worry about tomorrow. I was encouraged by the sunrise. Perhaps when we trust that God summons the sun to rise, we can be confident that, whatever tomorrow brings, it will also bring God with it. And so we can be content to leave tomorrow's trouble till tomorrow, to roll up our sleeves, and as children of the kingdom to face only those problems that walk through the door today.

Why Jesus? Because Jesus knows our hearts, with all our worries and anxiety. Because Jesus promises that our heavenly Father will take good care of us. And because Jesus wants to use us to help others, as minstrels whose work it is to lift up people's hearts.

Friends, if you are looking for a treasure worthy of your heart, I invite you to start there. Amen.



