

"Seeking First"

Matthew 6:25-33

October 4, 2015

19th Sunday After Pentecost – LWML Sunday

Today, the first Sunday in October, is LWML Sunday. This is a time of rejoicing and celebration over God's work among us and through the women of the LWML. But as you come to worship on this LWML Sunday, what is it that you are worried about? Yes, I know that any good pastor or any well-intentioned brother or sister in Christ will tell you that you should not worry, but we do. All of us. We know we shouldn't. We tell others that they shouldn't. We don't really like it when others tell us that we shouldn't. Yet worry seems to cling to us even when we are gathered with our brothers and sisters in Christ here in Divine Service or when we are gathered with groups of like-minded Christians at an LWML Zone or District events, or even in a very large group like at an LWML National Convention such as was held this past June in Des Moines, Iowa.

We tend to worry first about material needs. Some have to worry about having the basic necessities of life – food, clothing, shelter, and so on. I don't think that applies to most of us here. Some worry about being able to pay for the necessities of life and the few luxuries that make living enjoyable. Worrying about being able to pay our bills has probably applied to all of us at one time or another. Some worry about having the newest and most luxuries – computers, smart phones, flat screen televisions, campers, boats, and so on. Who hasn't dreamed of having more and justified their dreams by calling luxuries necessities?

We may also worry about spiritual needs and obligations, especially after receiving so many material blessings and experiencing "mountain top" spiritual experiences. A good example of this would be the recent LWML national convention in Des Moines. The theme was "Bountiful! Sow – Nourish – Reap". Those in attendance were reminded of their Baptism through which the seed of faith was sown into their hearts. They were nourished through daily use of God's Word and the celebration of the Sacrament of Holy Communion. They put that nourishment to good use in God's kingdom as they selected new LWML Mission Grant recipients totaling \$2,000,000. Everything was

wonderful. For many, there was not a care in the world as they spent time on the mountain top. Perhaps you have experienced that same care free feeling as we gather around Word and Sacrament here, especially during special times of worship at Christmas, Easter, and so on.

In the closing service in Des Moines, the women were encouraged in the sermon to consider the urgency of going into their communities and churches and families to sow the Word of God themselves, nourish the seeds of faith, and reap the harvest of souls by the power of the Holy Spirit in sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ. Isn't this the same challenge and urgency we face as individuals and as a congregation here?

This is where the worry begins. How do we respond to this awesome mission challenge which our Heavenly Father puts before us? Perhaps we worry as He calls us off the mountain top and back into the sin darkened world in which we live to share with people the life giving and life altering Good News of Jesus that we will even be able to do it. We worry whether or not we share it right. We worry about how people respond to the Good News. We worry and worry and worry.

Jesus offers a solution to worry in our text for today. In talking about all the things we need for life, Jesus tells us not to worry and says, "For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." It seems rather clear: seek first the Kingdom of God and how to be right with Him and He will supply all our needs.

The only trouble is that's not what we do. As people who are sinful by nature, we seek first our own little kingdoms by seeking to accumulate more and more stuff – money, possessions, toys, honor, glory, and so on. We are worried about getting such things and angry if we don't. We neglect the Kingdom of God and being right with Him by choosing not to hear His Word of Law that condemns us and His Word of Gospel which forgives us and makes us right with Him. When we decline His invitation to receive His gifts, we lose out on the life giving power of our Baptism and the life strengthening power of the Lord's Supper. It's no wonder we worry about things spiritual. We ignore or neglect the only source of power that we have.

There is One who has sought first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and that is Jesus Christ. He came into this world, bringing the Kingdom of God in His person and seeking people to inhabit that kingdom. Before we could even attempt to seek the Kingdom of God, the King sought us first. To have you and to have me as members of His Kingdom is, was and always shall be His first priority and desire. Knowing we did not have the righteousness – the perfect holiness – to enter the Kingdom of God, Jesus did what was necessary to overcome that barrier. He gave us His own righteousness and took our unrighteousness – our sin and its condemnation – upon Himself and to the cross. He gave that righteousness to you personally in Holy Baptism where He washed away your sin and made you clean. He renews that righteousness in you every time you hear His word of grace. He strengthens that righteousness in you and in us together as we gather at His table to be fed with His body and blood in His Supper. By the power of His resurrection to new life, each of us has a new life to live.

We are in His Kingdom. We don't have to seek it out. We have His righteousness as our own. We have no need or reason to worry about any need or responsibility, physical or spiritual. Regarding our physical needs, hear, believe and find comfort in Jesus' promise that His Father and yours will care for us just as He cares for the birds of the air, the lilies of the field, and "the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?" And if you need an answer to that rhetorical question at the end of those verses, the answer is a resounding "yes", as you have seen, heard, and experienced over and over again God's caring, providing hand in your life. You may not have everything you desire, but you will have everything you need.

Regarding our spiritual worries about responding to God's mercy by sharing His good news with others, the same is true. God will provide us what we need to do what He desires us to do. When we worry about being weak, God assures us as He did the great St. Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9) His grace is enough for us as we serve Him. His power, not ours, will enable us to carry out any mission

opportunity we face as individuals, as members of the LWML, as members of this congregation, and as members of our Synod. We need nothing but God's grace. We rely upon nothing but His power.

When we worry about being incompetent or unable to speak the Gospel in word or share God's love in action, our Father in heaven assures us that, as His forgiven, redeemed, restored children, we can boldly profess with St. Paul, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13) He gives us the strength to do all things which He calls and desires us to do. Make use of that strength by making use of His means for giving us that strength: His Word and Sacraments.

When we worry about what to say or how to say it when speaking the Gospel, especially in difficult situations, Jesus promises, "And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say." This doesn't mean we do not need to study, learn, and even memorize the Word of God, but it does mean that the Holy Spirit will help us to remember what we have learned and how to use it when we need it. He will give us the words to use and the courage to speak them in fearful times, such as we experience, and even in dangerous times as those young Christians in Oregon did when confronted with death for confessing Christ.

We have His Word in our heart to believe it, in our mind to understand it, and in our mouth to share it with the neighbor across the street, the friend at work, the son or daughter who has grown away from the Lord for whom our heart aches. We have the money in our wallets and pocketbooks to send and support those who will go in our place to speak the Word to those who live far away. We have His Kingdom and His righteousness to be at peace when we do these things.

Those of you who are old enough will remember Alfred E. Neuman who adorned the cover of Mad magazine, a satirical comic book in the 1960's. As you may remember, he looked kind of goofy and had as his theme, "What? Me worry?" His portrayal of "not worrying" seemed, at best, to be naïve, and, at worst, just silly. Some people (even some Christians) think that encouragement not to

worry about physical needs or spiritual service is the same: naïve or silly. Yet, as members of His Kingdom possessing His righteousness, we need not worry about our needs, physical or spiritual. They will be provided for. In responding to God's grace in Jesus Christ, when we are weak, we have His power. When we are without skill, we have His strength. When we lack words, the Holy Spirit will supply them. What? Me worry? There's absolutely no need to. Amen.