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Thanksgiving Eve – Matthew 6:25-33 - Seek First

11/23-24/22 – Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Beaver Dam, WI

Around this time of year, we Americans begin to be confronted with what we call “First-world problems.” These are problems that really aren’t problems anywhere else in the world, except where we are so blessed to think that they *are* actually problems. For example, I’m sure we’re all looking forward to Thanksgiving dinner tomorrow. It’s always a great time, but have any of your Thanksgiving Day celebrations ever been marred by the problem that this woman is having? Your table just isn’t big enough to fit all your food? Just plain tragic.

Or maybe you’re a big Black Friday shopper and you get up crazy early on Friday morning to get the best deals on Christmas shopping. You know that Black Friday shopping can be a contact sport – if you go to stores like Walmart or Best Buy, you might run into some dangerous and rowdy crowds. We hear stories about it every year. But like the people in this picture you persevere, risking life and limb and your own health and safety, because this year’s newest and coolest toys are worth it.

First-world problems. Thank God that he’s given us everything he has, we are blessed beyond compare; but what a shame that for so many God’s blessings have made us not thankful, but spoiled. It’s really a question of priorities, isn’t it? What means the most to you, in your heart of hearts? My dear Christian friends, this Thanksgiving and every day, let’s remember what our Savior wants us to seek first – not the things of this world, but his Kingdom and his Righteousness.

And I know as well as anyone, that’s hard to do. This world and this culture especially puts so much pressure on us to fit in and keep up with the Joneses. We can get so caught up in status symbols like having a new car, or a big house, or name-brand clothes, or going out to eat at nice restaurants that we forget sometimes that this world isn’t all about those material blessings, and we haven’t “made it” when we get them. This world isn’t about consuming yourself in getting the most, the best, the newest, the greatest – no matter how much all those commercials try to tell you – because being too concerned about things and how you stack up against everyone else will only make you forget that what’s really most important in life isn’t what you want and what you can buy; it’s what you *can’t*, it’s what you’ve been given – and that’s your relationship with Jesus Christ.

So Jesus in our text for today reminds us of that. He knows that we humans are worriers – whether we worry about how great our lives seem to others, or simply how we’re going to make it through the day. Either way Jesus knows the temptations that come with material blessings, so he calls us to repentance and he offers us his grace. He says, “*Seek first [God’s] kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*” Are you worried about food or clothes or anything else, like the people Jesus was speaking to were? Well Jesus says to you, don’t concern yourself with any of that. Don’t concern yourself with *physical* food and clothing. Rather, let your first priority in this world be searching

after spiritual food in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and spiritual clothes in the white robes of his righteousness, because those are the greatest blessings you can have. Through faith in Jesus Christ, God welcomes us into his heavenly kingdom, makes our sin-broken relationship with him right again, and brings us into his family as his dearly loved children. Through Jesus Christ, we have the greatest blessings we could ever ask for, blessings that are far greater than anything this world could ever give us – forgiveness, salvation, and the promise of eternal life with him in heaven.

So if you’re prone to worry about the things around you, look above you. Look to heaven and the joys that await you, and seek after those with all the tenacity and fervor that this world seeks after wealth and possessions. Keep God’s Kingdom and his righteousness as your life’s #1 priority and chase after those spiritual blessings, because the more you do that, the less of a place in your heart the things of this world will take up. When we realize that the goal of our existence is secured in our relationship with Jesus and is fulfilled in our hope for heaven, that means everything else is just gravy (pun intended). Since God has promised us a place in his Kingdom, he will certainly take care of us on our journeys until we get there.

It’s just like Jesus said. God takes care of the birds, even though they live day to day without the capacity to store up or plan ahead. He clothes the flowers of the field in beautiful splendor, despite the fact that they can be here today and gone tomorrow. Are you not much more valuable in God’s sight than those, or anything else in this world? People of God, don’t forget your Lord’s promise that you are the crown of his creation, the apple of his eye, and his total delight. He will *never* forget or forsake you. Instead, know that your heavenly Father is ruling this world for your good, that he’s almighty to provide for you in every situation, that he’s attentive to your every need, and that he’s gracious for your every want. Trust him, because he cares about you like loving parents doting over their children; he’s proved his love for you because he’s done so much for you already and given you so much more than you could ever rightly expect, and he promises that whatever happens, nothing can separate you from the love of Christ or keep you from your heavenly home. Our times are in his hands, so whether in plenty or in want, be sure that as long as God wants you to be in this world, he’s going to give you everything you need to keep going and fulfill his purposes.

And this Thanksgiving, hopefully those promises aren’t ones that you have to hope are true, but rather ones that you can acknowledge are true. Every one of us is wearing nice clothing, is well-nourished, probably came in our own vehicle, and has a home and a bed waiting for us when we leave. For those and for everything over and above them that our God has so graciously given to us, let’s be thankful – and not just today, but every day. And while we can’t be sure what kind of earthly blessings our God will grant us in our lives, we can be absolutely sure and so also especially thankful that we already have his greatest spiritual blessings, his Kingdom and his Righteousness, and that’s really all that matters. So my brothers and sisters, seek first what’s truly most important in your lives, and never let go of it. Keep your eyes fixed on heaven, see every day and everything you have as a blessing from your gracious God, and most of all thank God for everything he’s done and does for you, now and always. Amen.