



Liturgical Day: The Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost
Date: October 5, 2008
Sermon Title: Anxiety

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

There is a certain irony involved in speaking on today's topic, you know. Your Stewardship Team has laid out a five-week Fall program, that works through five separate themes, to help us prepare as we consider what and how we are going to commit to the financial support of Saint Peter's ministries in 2009. The first of these themes – today's theme – is "Anxiety." They gave us all fair warning that it was coming. It's been in newsletters and mailings and Sunday announcements. And so I am left to suspect that those in this congregation who most need to hear this sermon – those who are most anxious when they think about financial support of Christian ministry – some of them were probably too anxious to attend worship this morning, and are at home with the paper and a cup of coffee. And you are here, I'd guess, either because you weren't paying attention, and had no idea we were talking about this today... or because you are not especially anxious about being faithful with your finances, and were willing (maybe even interested) to hear what I had to say.

So I may be preaching to the choir today, or maybe I'm not. But I'm going to just push ahead anyway, and talk with you this morning about faithful financial stewardship and anxiety

The truth is, and every Pastor knows this, some of us do become anxious when it comes time to talk about money. A couple of years ago I told a story about a young single woman who had become pregnant. Her friend asked her if the baby's father was going to help with the expenses of raising the child. She said that she didn't know. The friend suggested that she ask him. Her response was telling: she said, "Oh we don't know each other well enough to talk about money."

Many of us are reluctant to talk with one another about money, so when the church announces that it is going to, that can make us anxious. It is even worse these days. With everything going on in the US markets these past weeks, even the most confident among us are a bit anxious about our financial future.

But our Stewardship Team is referring to a different kind of anxiety with this morning's theme. We are talking about the phenomena of becoming anxious when we consider increasing our charitable contributions. You know that that means, don't you? The Bible encourages us to be generous with our money. The Old Testament establishes the concept of the tithe – or giving 10% of our annual income for the support of Christian ministry. Expectations in the New Testament are even higher. Jesus commands us to be faithful with everything we have. He commends the poor widow who gives everything, and he challenges the rich young ruler to give it all away.

We're not going to challenge you to give it all away this year. But here at Saint Peter, we do recommend that every member become at least a tither to Christian ministry. Now I realize that if you are not doing that yet – if you are giving 1% or 2% or 3% of your income – it can be intimidating to think of giving that much support to the church. 10% is a lot of money for most of us. It is easy to wonder if we'll be able to get along without it. Especially in times like these, when money is a bit tight anyway, the challenge to dramatically increase how much we give to church can make us, well, anxious.

Why is that? It is actually pretty simple. Most of us have become accustomed to trusting ourselves for our day-to-day well being. We trust in our own ability to earn money, to make wise decisions about our money, and to develop thoughtful budget

FIRST LESSON
ISAIAH 5:1-7

PSALM
PSALM 80:7-14

SECOND LESSON
PHILIPPIANS 3:4B-14

GOSPEL LESSON
ST. MATTHEW 21:33-46

STEWARDSHIP LESSON
ST. MATTHEW 6:25-34

PRAYER OF THE DAY
**OUR LORD JESUS, YOU
HAVE ENDURED THE
DOUBTS AND FOOLISH
QUESTIONS OF EVERY
GENERATION. FORGIVE
US FOR TRYING TO BE
JUDGE OVER YOU, AND
GRANT US THE
CONFIDENT FAITH TO
ACKNOWLEDGE YOU AS
LORD. AMEN.**

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Living in God's amazing grace

plans for using our money.

One of the reasons that the Bible challenges us to tithe is to nudge us one step away from trusting ourselves, and one step closer to trusting God for our day-to-day well being. To put it more clearly: if, when the church asks us to increase our support of ministry, we become anxious, it may be a sign of our unwillingness to place our trust in God alone. This has been the central sin of human beings since the beginning of time. We think we know better. We think we can ignore God's command. We think that we can decide when and when not to obey God. But the end result is never as good, when we trust ourselves above trusting God.

Jesus dealt with it in his day. This weekend's text is evidence of that. He lived in a very worried time. Many of the people he met were just barely making it. They were subsistence farmers, most of whom hardly made enough to feed their families. No doubt they spent many nights, laying awake, wondering if they would have enough for their children to eat, or enough left over to sell and buy materials to make some clothing.

To these people, the word of Jesus must have come as a shock. Don't worry about what you'll eat, he says. Don't worry about what you'll wear. Look at how God takes care of creation. If you strive first for the kingdom of God; if you put God first in your life, Jesus says, all these things will be yours as well.

So what is he talking about? Admittedly, he is talking about the very basics of life. He is talking about healthy food and fresh water and sufficient clothing. He is not talking about \$4 lattes, or 80 gig iPods, or plasma screen televisions, or brand new automobiles. He isn't saying that if we believe in him, we'll be as pampered and prosperous as our neighbors are. He is saying that for those of us who put the kingdom first, God promises us that we'll always have what we need. We'll always have the basics of life. We won't be lacking for these simple necessities.

Maybe that's where our anxiety comes from. Maybe we become anxious about giving to the church, because we worry that if we give too much away, we won't be able to keep up with our neighbor. And do you know what: we probably won't. Tithers know that their support of ministry does not come without a price. It means that they won't be able to afford every pleasure their neighbor enjoys. And to be aware of that can make some of us anxious.

But trusting in God, and in God alone, helps deliver us from that anxiety. How does God do that? Well, when we make the decision to be generous – when we make the decision to trust God, it changes our perspective – it changes our priorities. It may not come all at once, like an instantaneous transformation. But when we are most interested in the kingdom of God, over time, we find that we yearn for less. We find that we have a deeper sense of contentment about what we have. We find that we have a richer sense of gratitude for what God has given us. And honestly, we spend a whole lot less time worrying about what we have, and what we will have.

In your weekly newsletter this morning, you'll find a copy of our Synod's "Landscape" bulletin. In it, Pastor Dan Bollman talks about a church he once served – a church that worshiped in a building constructed in the early 1930s. As the story goes, the church had been developing plans in 1929 for a new building. When the stock market crashed, their financial advisors encouraged them to put the project off until better times returned. But they were adamant, and continued with those plans. They were generous with their time and their money, and their efforts in 1930 have left a legacy that continues to stir that congregation nearly eighty years later. They could have bowed to the times, and let their anxiety stop that project. But they decided to trust God's word, and believe that God would see them through whatever hard times might come. What a great testimony to their faith!

Over the next four weeks, we're going to talk about our giving here at Saint Peter. I know that for some of us, that will cause a certain measure of anxiety. But I really do hope you'll hang in there with us. Continue to worship with us. Explore with us how we can overcome our anxiety and begin to consider sacrificial giving to God. Discover with us the peace that comes from God, when we finally turn our financial lives over to God's care. Experience the enthusiasm that comes from knowing that God is helping us to grow, and the enthusiasm that comes from being part of something that is amazingly helpful to people all over the world.

And at the end of the journey, we'll consider what it means that now is the time to make this faithful change in our lives.

In anxious times, people look for something solid and dependable to hang on to. Jesus offers us just that in this morning's Gospel. Whether our economy gets better or worse, let's make the decision to put the kingdom of God first in our lives, and know that with that commitment will come the peace of God that passes all understanding.

Amen.

David J. Risendal, Pastor

This Sunday at Saint Peter, we begin our Fall Stewardship Campaign. The theme is ASPEN, and the focus for the next five weeks will be:

Anxiety	10/5	St. Matthew 6:25-34
Sacrifice	10/12	St. Mark 12:41-44
Peace	10/19	St. John 14:25-27
Enthusiasm	10/26	St. Matthew 13:44-50
Now	11/2	2nd Corinthians 8:1-16

Gospel: English Text ⁱ

^{6.25} "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? ²⁶ Look 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? ²⁷ And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁸ And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰ But 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? ³¹ Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' ³² For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But 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. Today's trouble is enough for today. ⁱⁱ

Gospel: Greek Text

^{6.25} Διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὑμῖν· μὴ μεριμνᾶτε τῇ ψυχῇ ὑμῶν τί φάγητε [ἢ τί πίητε], μηδὲ τῷ σώματι ὑμῶν τί ἐνδύσθητε· οὐχὶ ἡ ψυχὴ πλεον ἔστιν τῆς τροφῆς καὶ τὸ σῶμα τοῦ ἐνδύματος; ²⁶ ἐμβλέψατε εἰς τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὅτι οὐ σπεύρουσιν οὐδὲ θερίζουσιν οὐδὲ συνάγουσιν εἰς ἀποθήκας, καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος τρέφει αὐτά· οὐχ ὑμεῖς μᾶλλον διαφέρετε αὐτῶν; ²⁷ τίς δὲ ἐξ ὑμῶν μεριμνῶν δύναται προσθεῖναι ἐπὶ τὴν ἡλικίαν αὐτοῦ πῆχυν ἓνα; ²⁸ καὶ περὶ ἐνδύματος τί μεριμνᾶτε; καταμάθετε τὰ κρίνα τοῦ ἀγροῦ πῶς ἀξάνουσιν· οὐ κοπιῶσιν οὐδὲ νήθουσιν· ²⁹ λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐδὲ Σολομῶν ἐν πάσῃ τῇ δόξῃ αὐτοῦ περιεβάλετο ὡς ἐν τούτων· ³⁰ εἰ δὲ τὸν χόρτον τοῦ ἀγροῦ σήμερον ὄντα καὶ αὔριον εἰς κλίβανον βαλλόμενον ὁ θεὸς οὕτως ἀμφιένυσσιν, οὐ πολλῶ μᾶλλον ὑμᾶς, ὀλιγόπιστοι; ³¹ μὴ οὖν μεριμνήσητε λέγοντες· τί φάγωμεν; ἢ· τί πίωμεν; ἢ· τί περιβαλώμεθα; ³² πάντα γὰρ ταῦτα τὰ ἔθνη ἐπιζητοῦσιν· οἶδεν γὰρ ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος ὅτι χρῆζετε τούτων ἀπάντων· ³³ ζητεῖτε δὲ πρῶτον τὴν βασιλείαν [τοῦ θεοῦ] καὶ τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ, καὶ ταῦτα πάντα προστεθήσεται ὑμῖν· ³⁴ μὴ οὖν μεριμνήσητε εἰς τὴν αὔριον, ἢ γὰρ αὔριον μεριμνήσει ἐαυτῆς· ἀρκετὸν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἢ κακία αὐτῆς· ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ A list of Bible lessons for the coming weeks is available at www.elca.org/dcm/worship/church_year/lectionary.html.

ⁱⁱ St. Matthew 6:24-34, New Revised Standard Version Bible (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

ⁱⁱⁱ St. Matthew 6:24-34, The Greek New Testament, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart). To display the Greek text correctly, choose Palatino Linotype font.