

Second Sunday after Pentecost

GOOD CREDIT

Matthew 6:24-34

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Analysis by Lori A. Cornell

24No 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.

25Therefore 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.

34So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

DIAGNOSIS: Borrowing Trouble

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Borrowing from Tomorrow for Today*

The current fiasco in the American home mortgage industry demonstrates several truths: 1) The American dream of every-citizen-a-homeowner has set us up for a great fall; 2) the American appetite for more is seemingly insatiable; 3) a sense of entitlement (that “I deserve more now”) has led people to make unwise—perhaps even defiant—choices about what they can and cannot afford; and 4) our current experiment with living beyond our means demonstrates that we have taken Jesus’ caution to not worry about tomorrow to a ridiculous extreme.

We 21st-century consumers cavalierly plan to worry much later than tomorrow (v. 34) and then we ransom our souls to a credit industry that offers us empty promises. As a culture we have outpaced every other nation for consuming food and every other product that the world has to offer. And, while the Third World faces a possible food shortage, we in the First World demand more of what the Third World cannot afford to keep; we take and take, and leave them with worry enough for today (since thinking about tomorrow is too overwhelming).

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Scared of Scarcity*

But maybe our voracious appetites expose a more serious ailment that “entitlement” (known as “avarice” back when we actually paid attention to the seven deadly sins). What if our relentless grab is really more akin to the desperation of the Donner party? What if the reason we reach for all these things (and more than we need) is because we are afraid of dying of starvation? And what if we’d rather face being confronted tomorrow with the

embarrassment of our wrong-consumption (be it food or a maxed-out credit card) than live with our hunger today? We are so afraid of being left empty by this life that we are willing to fill up on whatever is placed within our reach.

Oh, we worry about our lives (v. 25) and, worse, we worry that if there is a god, perhaps that god cares little more for us than for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field (vv. 26, 28). We challenge Jesus' assertion that our heavenly Father cares for us, and by our choices, we serve another master (v. 24): wealth.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Enough Is Enough!*

We strive to fill the emptiness we fear, end up serving a master that consumes us, and we miss God's kingdom and his righteousness (v. 33). And suddenly there is no tomorrow with God for us to worry about. The only One who can afford to get our souls out of hock is God alone. And why should he pay our debt?

PROGNOSIS: The Debt is Paid

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *It Is Enough (Satis Est)*

But pay our debt is exactly what God does in his Son Jesus on the cross. Jesus takes the blame, bears the burden, ransoms our souls, with his very own life. And by this single act he demonstrates that the God who cares for the birds of the air, and the lilies of the field, cares much more for us of little faith (v. 40). For us, to whom God says "enough!"; for us, who fear that enough is never enough, Jesus fills our emptiness with the fullness of God's mercy. The Reformers described this payment-in-full, made on the cross, as the act that is enough to satisfy the requirement of God's Law. The Law says "do this," and in Christ (his obedience to the Law, his devotion to his Father, his love for the world) the Law is satisfied. And it is

enough to make us right with God, and open the kingdom to us and all of “little faith.”

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Credited; Satisfied*

Jesus not only pays the debt we can't get out from under, he risks his own reputation and “marries himself to us” in baptism. Through the cross, in our baptism, we gain the benefit of Jesus' good credit with the Father. We may have come into this relationship with God weighed down by our inability to pay what we owe, but God has credited us with Jesus' own life, and we experience the relief of a burden lifted. Jesus strived for the kingdom and we have received his righteousness. And not only does Jesus' striving please the Father, but it satisfies (fills up) all that desperate emptiness we fear. And filled up with Christ, we trust that if God cares for the birds and lilies, no doubt God will provide for our deepest needs—even our little faith.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *One Day at a Time*

Which brings us back to what we will eat, drink, and wear. Or, maybe, not what we will eat or drink or wear, (many of us hearing this word know well that we are more-than-adequately provided for by God). Instead we consider what our brothers and sisters throughout the world will eat and drink and wear. We look at the unequal distribution of food, the way the world's markets direct their attention to our unreasonable First-World desires, we see how the wealthy of the world can too easily burden the shoulders of the poor, and we seek to shift the equilibrium. We think about what it might mean for us to live on less, to stare down our worldly cravings and learn to walk away, to love God's world more than we fear not having enough. We think about what it might mean for us to change, and then we step out.