

Title: Anxious for nothing
Text: Luke 12.22-31
Theme: Seek first God's Kingdom
Series: Luke
Prop Stmtnt: Worry does not provide you with what you need, but God's kingdom does.

That National Institute of Health says that Anxiety is a growing concern in the United States. In other words, the National Institute of Health is getting anxious over anxiety. There is a difference between general anxiety and anxiety disorders. Everyone experiences low level anxiety, but an anxiety disorder is when the anxiety becomes so prevalent that it interferes with one's ability to function normally in daily life. In 2015 the National Institute of Health determined that 5% of the U.S. population lived with an anxiety disorder. Today, just 10 years later, that has increased to almost 20% of the U.S. population. We hear people talk about panic-attacks, obsessive-compulsive disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder. These are types of anxiety disorders. So, why do people get anxious? That's not difficult to answer. In addition to Covid, we've had some serious natural disasters, school shootings, attacks at public events, wars, assassination attempts and some really heated rhetoric. Add to that the personal stuff going on with our families, health, job and friends and there is a lot of weight to carry. Life is traumatic and unpredictable and we are not in control. Is there more bad news than there used to be, or are we so connected with so much of the world that we are more aware of how bad it has always been? Either way, life in this world presents many opportunities to be anxious. Jesus obviously knows this and he knows that one of our default ways in trying to deal with anxiety is to try to exert control and for many, this comes in the form trying to be in charge of everything and everyone and for others accumulating wealth and possessions. If you think that acquiring enough money and stuff will fix your worry be warned. You will never have enough. We look at people with sufficient wealth and we tend to think that they do not live with the same worries that we do. Detroit's Joe Louis famously said, *"I don't like money, actually, but it quiets my nerves."*

Jesus just got done telling a story that seemed, well, stunning! Jesus did this quite a bit. Take this to heart. Jesus is the King of the Kingdom of God. But his kingdom is upside down as far as this world is concerned. Jesus commands us to seek his upside-down kingdom. He commands us to prioritize his kingdom. You cannot seek his kingdom and yours at the same time. You cannot prioritize his values and this world's. They are in conflict with each other. This text exposes our sin of unbelief so we can instead, trust in the promises of our good and sovereign God. Beloved, worry does not provide you with what you need, but God's kingdom does.

Read Text:

Is your life characterized by a general sense of worry or rest? Anxiety or peace? Insecurity or faith? Fretfulness or contentment? If you are a follower of Christ, then God is your Father. What are the implications of that? Jesus now speaks directly to his disciples. The story he previously told was to the crowd ("to them" v.15). Now he directs his words to his disciples because what he is commanding them to do is something not possible for those who are not followers of

Christ. What does Jesus say? He commands his disciples. *“Do not be anxious about your life, what you WILL eat, nor about your body, what you WILL put on.”* This is a command.

1. **Do not be anxious about the future.** (22-28)

What is going to happen to me? That is the question here, isn't it? What am I going to eat and what am I going to wear are two daily, common expressions of how we tend to worry about the future. Jesus is helping us see that we are anxious for nothing. Our worry is a waste. It is about the most unproductive thing you could do. We tend to think of worry as the white-collar sin of Christianity. It's not that big of a deal, like you know, the biggies! That is not true. Jesus is spending a good of attention addressing this, because worry is evidence of unbelief and that is serious and it is a complete waste of time and resources.

Imagine that in our next Member's Meeting that the Elders put forth a recommendation that we hire a new staff member whose title would be on-line arguer. Since people spend so much time arguing on-line, we decided that we need to take advantage of what people are doing and have a voice in the all of the verbal jousting. So, we want to hire someone to argue on line 5 days a week. These would be skilled at name-calling, ridiculing and mocking. You would rightfully think that the elders had lost their mind. Engaging in on-line arguments is a complete waste of time. So is worry, but for some of you, it is a full-time job with overtime. Why is it a complete waste of your life?

A. **The First Reason** (23)

Life is not about what you are going to eat or wear. When Jesus says not to worry about what you are going to eat or wear, I think he is referring to the basics of daily life and telling us not to live with anxiety even about the necessities, much less the other stuff.

When you worry about what you are going to eat and wear, you are wasting your energies on what does not matter. Life is not about food and clothes. Now, it doesn't seem like that, especially if you spend your hours watching the food channel. But Jesus is very explicit: “For” (explanation) “life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.” The purpose of your life goes way beyond what you eat and what you look like.

In those days, clothing did not change in styles much at all. Your clothing indicated your social status and if you were the child of a senator, statesman, land-owner, you did not dress like the servants and slaves. Or vice-versa. We certainly have some of this in our culture of how your dress says things about you, but it was really a big deal back then and here Jesus is saying, life is more than food and the body is more than clothing. Jesus is going right after our value system, isn't he? The things you tend to think are important, are not important. There are more important things. We are like kids who do not know the difference between what has real value and what doesn't.

C.S. Lewis famously said in his book, *The Weight of Glory*, *"It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily satisfied."*

The things we think will satisfy us, don't. And yet, we worry that we may lose them. Jesus commands us not to worry about what the future because God will give us what we need.

B. First Example - Ravens (24-26)

Jesus points to ravens. Ravens do not plant gardens. There is no raven farm with crops, barns, silos or harvesters. They don't have a futures market or worry about crop conditions. Fact is, they do nothing to provide for their own food even for the next day. They don't have take-home containers. They live day to day. They do not have storage units, refrigerators, freezers, or beef jerky. And yet, they live. His point? *"God feeds them.* God takes care of them day after day after day. This is a rather extreme example Jesus gives. Birds do not wake up in the morning and go to their frig or scrounge around in their pantry for something to munch on before they go to work for the day. They wake up and go to work which is getting something to eat for that morning. They eat what they need for that day. *God feeds them.* The ravens do not have multi-level nest condos with basement rooms for food storage.

How many of you have storage units because you cannot fit all of the stuff that you own in your home? So, you take the stuff that you don't need in order to live and you pay good money to store it because, well, because, you don't want to get rid of it. Why not? Well, because you may need it someday. Beloved, you know I love you, but that is crazy. If you don't need it to live, you probably don't need it. 1 in 10 American households has a storage unit. Storage units have become a massive multi-billion-dollar business in country because people have too much stuff. They have too much stuff because they trust in their stuff. There is a trend to de-clutter. Good! However, many of those who de-clutter do not get rid of the stuff, they just put it in storage units, just in case. Look at the birds (v.24). They have neither storehouses nor barns. God takes care of them. How many of you can't fit your car(s) in your garage because you have too much stuff? Or you have boxes that you have never unpacked from your last move which was over a year ago, or you moved the same unopened box from place to place? What good is it to be weighed down or concerned about stuff that you don't need and that only costs you money, time and space when you have a good God who loves you and will provide for you?

Of how much more value are you than the birds!"

3-year-old Amelia (not her real name) was recently left alone in a strange apartment. Her mom, unsuccessfully trying to detox from heroin, left Amelia in order to get high. It was not the first time Amelia had been left alone. She was found and a rescue effort was made. A couple of days later she was living with a young couple who took her in and started to give her something she had never experienced: a man, who was like a dad, who loved her and began to experience

something else; the same place to sleep every night. A few nights ago, Amelia asked her temporary parents with a bit of amazement, “Do you get to sleep in the same place every night?” If Amelia woke up from a nap or found herself alone in a room, even for a few seconds, she would begin to cry. She was constantly afraid of being left alone and was always worried that these new parents would leave her.

Some of you have experience as foster parents. Children, often broken, afraid, lonely and confused are placed into your care. You welcome them, love them, feed them, provide for them, sacrifice for them, pray for them and with them. You buy them clothes and accept them as one of your own, only to hear them worry that one day you are going to leave them, like everybody else. You wonder how you can convince this child that she has no reason to worry. You will take care of her. Her experience of loneliness and fear of rejection is so powerful that it seems to take years to convince her that you are different.

Before we came to faith in Christ we were just like Amelia. We were under the abusive authority of Satan. We learned to distrust because we were told and experienced so many lies. We lived with fear we would be left alone. Even after coming to Christ, we struggle with believing if God’s promises really are true. Is God really going to take care of me? Sin affects us so deeply that we struggle with the idea that God truly loves us and will take care of us. It is not rational to question God, when you consider that God feeds the birds AND he sent Christ to die for us, why do we wonder? Can I really trust God to provide for me?

Besides (v.25-26), how does worry extend your life span? Can you add even a single hour to your life through worry? Worry is similar to complaining. It is very common and pretty much a complete waste of time. From the perspective of getting something reasonable accomplished, worry doesn’t fix a thing. For many, worry is debilitating. Proverbs talks about the man who refuses to work because of his fear that something dreadful could happen to him.

C. Second Example - Lilies (27-28)

Jesus then gives a second example. Consider the lilies. The birds were an example of someone who ate without worrying about it and the lilies are an example of someone who has adequate clothing without worrying about it. His point is that lilies are provided for by God and even Solomon with all of his wealth and resources was not decked out like the lilies. The point is clear. You are worth more to God than lilies that do not last very long. We have a couple of peonies in our yard and this year they were spectacular for about 3 days. That didn’t last too long. The land of Israel did not have an abundance of forests and trees like we do in Michigan. Wood was often scarce so dried grass and vegetation was often the fuel for fires to cook or bake with. Again, the point is clear: If God cares to clothe the flowers of the field like lilies (and peonies) that are so momentary, *how much more* will he clothe you, O you of little faith!

D. The Second Reason (29-30)

Look at v.29. Jesus is reiterating the command from v.22 in order to give us another reason why we should not be consumed with, obsessed about the future. That reason is very clear. *“Your Father knows that you need them.”* The world does not have this assurance. They do not have God as their Father, therefore they do not have the security that we do. Of course, they are going to fret and panic and be anxious about what to eat and wear. These things are not our big concerns. At least they shouldn’t be. When we engage with our missionaries, we are tempted to make the conversation about food and clothes. Those are realities, but they are not the important ones. Your Father knows that you need food and clothes. Don’t panic.

Transition: What is the opposite of worry? Is it apathy? Is it laziness? Is it a “whatever” attitude toward everything? No. In the Scriptures, the opposite of worry is faith. Worry produces unproductive activity, even debilitating thoughts. Faith produces responsible obedience. Instead of obsessing about what to eat, we acknowledge that God has given us strength to work, minds to plan and skills to employ so that we can, by his grace, eat. God feeds us by giving us what we need either to get the food or by using others to share that food with us when we cannot do it ourselves. Faith drives a focused and joyful obedience. So, instead of being anxious about the future...

2. Be focused on the Kingdom of God above all else. (31)

I will develop this a bit more next week when we look at verses 32-34, but here is a bit to consider until then. How do we seek the Kingdom of God? The kingdom of God has a King and we are not the King. We are the happy citizens and subjects of the King. Therefore...

A. By living in joyful surrender to the King.

When you live in obedience to the King, you reflect the glory of his authority. When you live in fear of the King, you reflect the glory of his might and strength. But when you live in joyful, trusting surrender to the King, you reflect the glory of his goodness. Our King is good. Our King is gracious. Our King is merciful. Our King is love. Our King is faithful. Our King is forgiving. Our King is kind. Our King is glad. Our King sings over the citizens of his kingdom. Your pursuit of holiness and faithfulness reveals that you really believe that. Seeking the Kingdom means that you seek the King. You love the King. You want to represent the King and you think that he is so good and so glorious that you are intent on making him known.

B. By spreading the news of the King and the Kingdom.

There is no kingdom without the gospel of the kingdom. Without the gospel, there are no people who are redeemed. Therefore, the advancement of the kingdom of God is dependent upon the spreading of the gospel. God has raised up the church to guard the integrity of the message of the gospel, to preach the gospel, to help guard the reputation of the gospel by guarding our lives and to spread it to other places, cultures and ethnicities. We seek to have deep relationships so we can help one another live faithful lives so we can plant more churches,

send and support missionaries who will reach more people to live in joyful surrender to the King.

C. By advancing the health and the establishment of the church.

Do you see why the church matters so much? The church is the means that God has raised up to advance his kingdom in this world. There is no advancing of the kingdom without the advancing of the church. Do you see why the planting and cultivating of healthy churches around here and around the world is so critical? This is why you live. And when we focus on the ultimate things, God takes care of the immediate things. "And these things will be added to you." What things? Food and clothes.

Sandra McCracken wrote,

"We will feast in the house of Zion

We will sing with our hearts restored

He has done great things, we will say together

We will feast and weep no more."

Worry does not provide you with what you need, but God's kingdom does.