

Don't worry. Thank God.

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

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The story is told of two men were walking through a field one day when they spotted an enraged bull. Instantly they darted toward the nearest fence. The storming bull followed in hot pursuit, and it was soon apparent they wouldn't make it.

Terrified, the one shouted to the other, "Say a prayer, John. We're in for it!"

John answered, "I can't. I've never said a public prayer in my life."

"But your dad was a pastor – surely he taught you some sort of prayer! So pray John, pray! The bull is catching up to us."

"All right," panted John, "I'll say the only prayer I know, the one my father used to repeat at the table: 'O Lord, for what we are about to receive, make us truly thankful.'"

Friends, we are gathered here this evening to celebrate God's generosity, kindness, love, goodness and mercy. As we remember these things, we are moved to thank him. But do you feel right now like you're being chased by a bull? Does this make it hard to pray prayers of thanksgiving? If we were to say a thanksgiving prayer now, and each of you were asked to add some words of thanksgiving of your own, would the words come readily, or would you need to stop and really think?

At first glance, the sermon text for this evening doesn't seem to directly correspond to Thanksgiving. The main message is "do not worry." Sometimes we better can understand one concept by contrasting it with its opposite. What is the opposite of thankfulness? The first answer that pops into our heads is probably "ingratitude," right? But in a sense, the opposite of thankfulness can also be "worry." Can we simultaneously be thankful for something and worried about it at the same time? If you are worried I didn't fix your computer right, are you truly thankful I fixed it? If your uncle promises to pay your mortgage for the next three months, is your "thank you" heartfelt if you are truly worried he won't follow through on his promise?

Now let me ask you this, can we simultaneously be thankful to God for all he's given us, and at the same time be worried about our lives... what we will eat, what we will drink, what we will wear? Think about that as I read the sermon text:

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? [So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all

these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." (Matthew 6:25-34)

Jesus spoke these words as he preached the Sermon on the Mount. He spoke to a large group of believers. He spoke to people like you and I, who certainly were far worse off than we are. They lived in poverty, medical care was terrible, food, shelter and clothing were by no means a given.

Jesus taught these believers a simple but important truth: "Don't be anxious about your life." If we have concern over possible danger or misfortune that may threaten our life and well being, we are sinning.

If worry and anxiety about our earthly needs is a sin, then which of the Ten Commandments are we sinning against? Maybe the answer to that question doesn't immediately come to mind. Perhaps we're sinning against the Seventh Commandment which says, "Do not steal." Or perhaps we're breaking the 9th and 10th Commandments which warn us about coveting. These would be good guesses. But Jesus himself tells us which Commandment we break when we worry in the verse immediately preceding our text. "No one can serve two masters. You cannot serve both God and money. We cannot serve both God and worldly riches. Jesus is telling us in today's sermon text that it is not possible to love God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind **and** love the riches of this world too. To love worldly things (even if we claim to love God too) shows that our love for God is not complete. In time, it becomes clear where our true devotion lies.

Now, what does all of this have to do with worrying? If we worry about food, drink, clothes or shelter, then we are showing that we are not fully devoted to God. Instead, we are serving the "god" of earthly wealth. If we worry about our earthly needs, we are revealing our lack of trust in God. We're saying that he is not able or not willing to provide all that we need. If we fully trusted God, we would also have to fully trust him to take care of our earthly needs as well.

Or think of it this way... the person who is totally devoted to God, who trusts in him, and is dependent on Him says, "Without God, I am not complete and I cannot be content." The person who is devoted to worldly things says, "Without enough earthly things I am not complete and I cannot be content." Thus, if we worry about earthly things and feel we are lacking in them, we are demonstrating that our true God is worldly things. People worry when they feel their "god" is missing in their lives.

Jesus is very direct. **"So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them."** And so Jesus is saying, "If you are anxious about food, clothes and the things of this world, you are an idolater... you are a heathen! You worship the false god of earthly possessions!"

And so, what commandment do we break when we worry? We break the first commandment: "You shall have no other gods." Of all the commandments, we probably feel this is the easiest to keep. We think, "I don't have other gods. I don't have any idols. I only worship the true God." But Jesus shows us that if we worry about our earthly needs, we are breaking the first commandment!

Now let's tie this back in to Thanksgiving. If we are constantly worrying about the things of this world and thus breaking the 1st Commandment, can we simultaneously be properly and fully thanking God as he so deserves? It's impossible, isn't it?

Friends, what is it in your life that is diverting your trust from God and causing you to worry? So many things tempt us to doubt God and worry. What have you been worrying about today? This past week? During the past month?

Let's have a true Thanksgiving today. Stop worrying. Trust God. "But how?!" you may ask. We don't consciously set out to worry, do we? It just kind of happens. There's only one way to get rid of worry and be filled with true thankfulness.

First, we take to heart what God says in his Word that worrying really is a sin. We acknowledge our guilt and confess it to God. James Seward wrote the following poem titled "His Will," which summarizes our need for confession.

It is His will that I should cast
My care on Him each day;
He also bids me not to cast
My confidence away.
But oh! how foolishly I act
When taken unaware,
I cast away my confidence
And carry all my care!

Ask God to forgive you for your lack of trust and your anxious worry.

Second, listen to God's Word when he tells you that your sins of worry and anxiety and lack of trust are fully and freely forgiven in Christ Jesus. Jesus lived his life worry-free with a perfect trust in the Father. God credits that life to you. Jesus suffered and died on the cross because he had taken on himself our worry and anxiety. He was punished in our place. Jesus paid it all... we know this is so because he rose on the third day. Friends, your sin of worry and anxiety is forgiven in Christ Jesus.

Third, hear God's wonderful promises that he not only took care of your greater need, (that is the forgiveness of all your sins and the restoration of your life to God), but he also has promised to take care of your lesser needs! God provides for birds. How much more does he care to take care of you? God cares enough to clothe flowers of the field beautifully! How much more will he care to clothe you? You are not forgotten by God... he knows your every need. If an earthly father is inclined to take care of the needs of his children. How much more is your heavenly Father inclined to take care of your needs?

Confident in God's love, mercy and acceptance... confident that he will provide all that we need for body and life... now we can truly have a Happy Thanksgiving! Now we can truly rejoice and thank God for all he has done for us throughout our life, and be confident he will take care us until the end. Now we can see how it is possible to do what Paul wrote in his letter to the Philippians. "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" And to the Thessalonians: (1Thes 5:18) "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

Give thanks to the Lord, dear believers, for you have know and have experienced that he is good, and his love endures forever. Amen.

And the peace of God which transcends all human understanding will guard and keep your hearts and your minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.