

Sermon Brief

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January 24, 2016

Text: Matthew 6:25-34

Title: “The Priority of the Kingdom”

Subject: Our Heavenly Father knows about and will meet our needs.

Complement: We are freed to seek His kingdom and His ways first.

Textual Idea: Since our Heavenly Father knows what we need and is committed to supplying, we can focus entirely on seeking first His Kingdom and His ways.

Sermon Idea: If I really believe that my Heavenly Father is good, then I will trust Him - and that frees me to thrive and not just survive.

Interrogative: Do I believe my Heavenly Father is good?

Key word/Transitional sentence: Unless I believe that my Heavenly Father is good, I will not be able to trust Him and thrive. I will live in constant worry with survival as my goal.

Key Points:

I can trust my heavenly Father because...

1. He takes great care of even little creatures.
2. He says I am valuable and of great worth.
3. He knows and will meet all my needs.
4. He wants me to thrive in Him.

What do I want people to know? I want people to know that our Heavenly Father is good and can be trusted with our cares and concerns. I want them to realize how worry is self-reliance and it sucks the life out of us. I want them to know that they can thrive in Christ through faith.

What do I want people to do? I want people to (1) entwine with God by praying about their concerns, (2) see God’s detail hand in daily provision and thank Him for it, (3) and actively seek to address heart wounds that keep me from trusting my Heavenly Father.

What need am I addressing? I am addressing the need to keep focused on the kingdom as my top priority in life.

“The Priority of the Kingdom”

January 24, 2015

Matthew 6:25-34

If I really believe that our Heavenly Father is good, then I will trust Him -and that frees me to thrive and not just survive.

Hello. I am Masha Ringquist...I teach elementary school art in Farmington and also occasionally create my own artwork. What you see is my **(LCD) latest sculpture** that was recently displayed along with other faculty art work at Tunxis CC: It is an artist's interpretation of what different types of snow looks like if viewed under a microscope. I made each snowflake by forming and tooling sheet metal.

Real snowflakes grow and evolve according to the temperature and moisture in the air as they travel through a cloud. All snowflakes start as **(LCD) hexagonal crystals**, as illustrated on one of the birch logs. As the temperature approaches 23 F, the **(LCD) hexagonal crystals form hollow columns**, which are the most common type of snowflake. When the moisture is high, like an ice storm, it will snow needle like **(LCD) snowflake columns**. With colder temperatures and higher moisture, the crystal collects more particles as they travel through the clouds and fall to earth in the form of the snowflakes we are most familiar with: **(LCD) the ones with six points** and elaborate designs also known as crystal dendrites. (No two snowflakes are alike)

So, the next time you are exhausted from shoveling the stuff, think of how beautiful snow is at this level! And God tells us in Isaiah 55:10-13 that he gave us rain and snow to water the earth and make it bud and flourish.

Thanks for sharing your beautiful sculpture with us Masha. Masha is right. God has sent these snowflakes to cause the earth to bud and flourish – to thrive! That is God's desire for us. And yet, the very means by which God blesses us, snow, is something that we fret about! I mean just look at the weather reports about this latest storm. The apocalyptic predictions began BEFORE the storm had even coalesced! And then each day was more predictions, “It's going north, it's going south, it's getting bigger, it's not...” On and on with worry and concern. And when the snow finally does come, when the incredibly and expertly designed flakes Masha told us about come, we see work and pain instead of beauty and provision. We despise what our Good, Good Father has sent for our thriving. My question this morning is this, ‘Do I believe my Heavenly Father is good?’

We're in a sermon series called **(LCD) “The Kingdom of Heaven is like...”** We're walking through the gospel of Matthew seeking to understand this concept of the Kingdom of Heaven. Right now we're in the Sermon on the Mount, chapter 6, so go ahead and turn there. In this sermon, Jesus lays out for us the reality of the presence of the Kingdom of God right here, right now. He wants us to see differently...like with the snowflakes. He wants us to see His goodness. Let's look: Matthew 6, starting in verse 25:

25 “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 than food, and the body more than clothes? 26 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? 27 Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?”

28 “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 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—you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

This section begins with a ‘therefore’ which means it is the natural progression of what came before it, verse 24, “*You cannot serve both God and Money.*” Two weeks ago, I preached that Jesus advised us to invest our lives in what lasts forever THEREFORE our lives should reflect that choice. What that means is when we’ve chosen to put God first, worry leaves our lives. Let’s see, verse 25, “*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 than food, and the body more than clothes?*” Jesus commands us (‘do not worry’ is a command) to not be worried about our life or our body; in other words, our physical, earthly needs and concerns. He asks us to trust Him with these things, to believe He is good. But why? I believe there are four reasons and the first is found in two comparisons to the natural world.

First, in verse 26, “*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? 27 Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?*” Jesus says to look, which is also a command, look, carefully observe, the birds of the air. Pay close attention to what I’m up to with these easily overlooked creatures. They don’t plant gardens, they don’t have big, old barns that they build to store their future provisions and yet food’s on the table every day! God takes good care of them. Who does? “Your heavenly Father” – we’re getting a glimpse into His character. And if the heavenly Father faithfully cares for tiny birds, won’t He even more care for those who are much more valuable, you and I? Do I believe my Heavenly Father is good?

Actually, we doubt His care, don’t we? How we must bewilder the birds of the air! I found this interesting poem in my research: **(LCD)**

*Said the robin to the sparrow;
‘I should really like to know
Why these anxious human beings
Rush about and worry so.’
Said the sparrow to the robin:
‘Friend, I think that it must be
That they have no heavenly Father,
Such as cares for you and me.’*

What other conclusion can the birds come to?! We humans perform the “Worry Show” every day before creation, don’t we?! We are worried! Need some proof? Look at this recent **(LCD) Gallup Poll** about what worries Americans.

1. 54% - The availability and affordability of healthcare
2. 53% - The economy

3. 51% - The possibility of future terrorist attacks in U.S.
4. 46% - The Social Security system
5. 46% - The size and power of the federal government
6. 46% - The way income/wealth are distributed in U.S.

Are you thinking about any of these? I am! Well, we're not alone. Half of all Americans are worried with us! And it is not just the adults either!

According to psychologist Robert Leahy's book *Anxiety Free*, **(LCD) "The average American child today exhibits the same level of anxiety as the average psychiatric patient did in the 1950s."** He blames this on things like we just saw plus the breakdown of the family and community. Finally, he summarizes this way, **(LCD) "We live in the Age of Anxiety We've become a nation of nervous wrecks."** We're a nation of nervous wrecks! And so Jesus commands us, let me repeat that, Jesus commands us not to worry. It is sin. It is a big deal and it is causing us to merely survive instead of thrive. So first of all, what is it?

The word here is **(LCD) merimnao**, it used six times in our passage this morning and it means *"to be anxious, unduly concerned, perpetually uneasy," "to brood, to think moodily about something."* According to the old pastor Warren Wiersbe, the root word means, *"to be drawn in different directions." Worry pulls us apart.* I love this word picture. Worry is being pulled in different directions. It is scattered, weak. It results in confusion and unsettledness. So what do we do? We try to organize the chaos. We lay in bed trying to think everything through, pull the various strands together into some kind of order to bring some kind of sense of...control. Really, worry finds its root in control.

And that is crazy because of what we just read at the end of verse 27, *"Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?"* The obvious answer? No. We do not have control over even one hour of our lives, let alone days, months and years! Other translations say, *"add one cubit to your stature."* This verse is hard to translate. Either way it is the same idea – we have no ultimate control over our lives! And when we try to control what is not ours to control we become Dr. Frankenstein – we create monsters of destruction. It is foolish to worry about what we have no control over. I believe what Jesus is saying is that if we can truly agree that God is in control of our lives and our bodies, then it is a simple thing to trust Him for little things like food.

And clothes as we see in the next comparison in verse 28, *"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 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—you of little faith?"* Here Jesus compares us to flowers or lilies of the field that grow wild and carefree. They don't labor or spin. We do...intense laboring and spinning in our over-active schedules to provide for ourselves. Not the brightly colored flowers! They got swag! Not even the pinnacle of style, Solomon, in all His elaborate splendor could compare!

And then once again, Jesus says if that is how God takes intricate care of even carefree flowers, temporary creations destined for the fire, won't he take care of us, eternal ones, who are made in His very image, the pinnacle of His treasured creation!? O us of little faith! We just don't realize how valuable and amazing we human beings really are. How

much our Father our Creator marvels over us. We need to ask ourselves, ‘Do I believe my Heavenly Father is good?’

So our first two reasons why we can trust our heavenly Father are **(LCD) He takes great care of even little creatures and He says I am valuable and of great worth.** We must believe this and we will if we do what Jesus says, observe carefully how God takes care of even the tiniest creation. Look again at one of **(LCD) Masha’s snowflake sculpture.** Just imagine that each snowflake is completely unique and at its lowest level is this ordered and complex – crafted in the Kingdom of Heaven by our heavenly Father. He is a good, good Father! Imagine if He takes care of things like this, with this much precision, how carefully He is crafting our lives. We can trust Him. We matter to Him.

And yet we are worry-worts, aren’t we? We don’t take time to really observe and see God’s billions of blessings in the snowstorm. No, we get caught up in the everyday like poor old Martha, **(LCD) “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”** Any Martha’s in the house? I’m one. Worry-wort extraordinaire. Look at all I have to do! I don’t have time to talk to God or anyone else for that matter. God forgive me for sinning against You. Help me to trust that You really are a good, good Father. And one way to do that is to hear Jesus’ admonition – only one thing is necessary.

Earlier I told you that the root of the word for worry means to be drawn in different directions, frayed, splayed, split apart in numerous directions. One of the key remedies is to focus on the one thing that matters...but how? Let me share another important root word which comes from a Sylvia Gunter devotional I got this week on Isaiah 40:31 about the discipline of waiting, say it with me, **(LCD) “Those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary.”**

Look at the insight Sylvia brought, **(LCD) “The Hebrew word ‘qavah,’ which is translated ‘wait’ in Isaiah 40:31, means ‘to bind together like a cord.’ As we wait on the Lord in stillness before Him with our hearts in a quiet state, it is like adding strands to a rope to strengthen it. Picture the process of making a rope by twisting or weaving (binding) thin cords together to form the rope... We can assume that the more we are still to listen to God, the stronger we become.”** What a contrast: worrying is to split apart in many directions. Waiting on God is to entwine myself in Him through stilling my soul before Him like a weaned child in the arms of a good, good Father. Will we listen to Jesus and make time in our crazy world to listen quietly at His feet?

Having made His comparisons, Jesus gives two more reasons for trusting our heavenly Father. Verse 31, *So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’* 32 *For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.* Our heavenly Father knows that you need them! The pagans who don’t know God at all, don’t think He exists, run after all these things – what we eat, drink and wear. The word for ‘run,’ **(LCD) epizeteo, is very intense and it means “to be seriously interested in or have a strong desire for something; strive after; demand.”** That describes our world, doesn’t it? Look at TV

commercials, go to Times Square, check out the billboards all around us – come and eat, drink, wear the latest fashions – it’s everywhere clamoring for us to pursue eagerly!

But God says, ‘Not you my son, not you my daughter.’ I have something much better than a night at Cheesecake Factory in your latest swag! Verse 33, *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.* 34 *Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.* Stop looking for the latest and greatest. Stop worrying about whether you’ll have enough food, drink or clothes tomorrow. Stop fretting about your child’s college plans, your doctor’s appointment next week, your rent due at the end of the month. Focus right here, right now on the presence of my kingdom. Focus right here, right now on my righteousness, on doing things my way. Focus right here, right now on the abundant life that is in me and I PROMISE I will take care of what you need. Maybe not what you want, but hopefully, as you focus on me that will change too. Our third and fourth reasons we can trust our heavenly Father is because **(LCD) He knows and will meet all my needs and He wants me to thrive in Him.** Do I believe my Heavenly Father is good?

Someone has said that the average person is crucifying himself between two thieves: the regrets of yesterday and the worries about tomorrow. That is so sad...and it is NOT the thriving that our heavenly Father has in mind for us according to Jesus. So what do we do? First, we believe our Father is good as Jesus has told us. When we believe He is good, we’ll trust Him. We see this in 1 Peter 5, **(LCD) “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. [BY] Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.** We need grace and God ONLY gives it to those who humble themselves BY casting their anxieties upon Him. But notice, we’ll only cast our anxieties on Him if we believe He cares for us. We need to wait on the Lord with our issues, entwine ourselves in Him through quiet prayer, if we’re going to experience peace. How are you doing with your quiet time with Jesus? Distracted at all? Try writing down your cares before you start and then, one by one, give them to God, “Lord, here is my concern for this oil bill. I place it in Your good hands.” Pray about each one and then read the Bible and pray. That has been helpful to me.

Another verse many of you know that encourages us to pray is **(LCD) Philippians 4:6-7, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”** Note how Paul adds in ‘with thanksgiving.’ We need to learn to see the beauty in the snowflakes instead of the work of the snowstorm. Remember **(LCD) Masha’s piece** – ask God to help you see the beauty in His handiwork and thank Him for it.

Lastly, for many of us, the unresolved wounds of our past keeps us from experiencing God’s peace and shalom, His kingdom blessings. If we had bad relations with our fathers we can’t see God as our Father being a good thing. There is no easy road for healing our deep wounds but I can tell you that I’ve witnessed God doing amazing transformation in many, many people...including me. As I have brought my junk out into the light, I have found the power of Christ able to deliver me from excessive anxiety. I

still struggle with it from time to time, especially with money and parenting – vestiges of a dysfunctional childhood. But I can testify that the more I get to know the love of my good, good Father and the more I understand who I am in Him – valued, loved, of amazing worth, the more peace I experience.

Jesus has been explaining the goodness of the Father by arguing from the lesser to the greater – if God takes care of birds and flowers, the lesser, won't He take even more care of us, the greater. We're valuable. In Romans, Paul uses the opposite argument, greater to the lesser to teach the same lesson, **(LCD) "Since he (God) did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else?"** If we ever doubt the love and the goodness of our heavenly Father, all we need do is look at the cross. If God gave us His only Son, the greater, won't He give us bread and drink and clothes, the lesser? O, we of little faith!

Do you believe your heavenly Father is good? A story I shared a few years ago illustrates this so well. A couple named Fred and Cheryl went to Haiti to pick up a child they had adopted. Addie was five-years-old. Her parents had been killed in a traffic accident that left her without a family and in extreme poverty. Upon her first night in her new American home, she sat down to the fullest, most sumptuous feast she'd even seen! Heaping plates of chicken, vegetables, potatoes, bread, etc.. She was overwhelmed...until her two new teenaged brothers scoffed everything down. The food was gone! Sensing Addie's concern...Cheryl took her by the hand and brought her to the kitchen and into the pantry. She showed Addie all the food they had – had her hold each can, each package – and then she bent down, looked her in the face and said, "Addie, you will always have enough in this house! Don't you ever worry again about having enough!" My main point this morning is this, **(LCD) If I really believe that my Heavenly Father is good, then I will trust Him -and that frees me to thrive and not just survive.** Our Heavenly Father is a good, good Father and there will always be plenty in His house for His beloved children. No worries.