

Gifted Beyond Imagination
Menno Mennonite Church
July 17, 2022

Purpose: To re-connect with the gifts of God that are beyond our imaginations.

Message: Even in the big things of life and living, we rely on the provision of God in all things.

Scripture: Matthew 6:19-34

Synopsis: In the last several weeks we have been looking at the description of the new kingdom that Jesus is inaugurating. We have heard the call to think in new ways, and to act for the sake of the kingdom. Now we celebrate the kingdom, the body that is formed by these words and the way that these challenging ways bring us together from all people and all places. Most challenging of all the ways of the kingdom is placing and growing our trust in God's provision for us. We are invited into the challenging freedom of trusting this provision in world that exceeds our very imaginations

Matthew 6:19 - 34

¹⁹ "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth,
where moth and rust¹ consume
and where thieves break in and steal;

²⁰ but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven,
where neither moth nor rust¹ consumes
and where thieves do not break in and steal.

²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²² "The eye is the lamp of the body.
So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light;
²³ but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness.
If then the light in you is darkness,
how great is the darkness!

²⁴ "No 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.¹

²⁵ "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life,
what you will eat or what you will drink,¹
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?¹

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 ¹
and his² 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.

We have been spending these summer weeks in the midst of familiar, but important material. We have been sitting with the Sermon on the Mount and the overarching characteristic of the endeavor could be summarized with this: embrace different. Think differently, do differently, and in doing that you will join the way the world can be. We have reframed the notion of blessing and what, in that knowledge it means to work with blessing. We have been challenged to open ourselves to the ways we deal with the stuff of life in ways that express the Spirit of God's integrity and love, and beyond the demands of satisfying the law. We are not only to think differently, but more so to live differently by the virtue of the new way that Jesus is laying out in these words. While there is a whole undertaking to be found within the interpretation and re-conception of what all this means, and how all this actually looks, most of this is fairly straight forward. Live not with the world in mind, but that of the kingdom, practicing what you have heard as a good disciple should. Its challenging; its revolutionary; even on occasion dangerous, but it is also tangible, workable, present in our daily life and living.

It is ironic, then, that it is some of the more fundamentally simple models of trusting God for provision that we struggle with implementing in realistic fashion, especially we in North American. Of course we speak well of commending ourselves to God's hand, and knowing God's grace in all things. But the wealth we have been given, especially we consider our wealth on a global scale often complicates our realistic understanding in and trust of these the promises that God provides, and richly so. We have our personal stories of provision and miraculous "enoughness", but that doesn't mean we are about to let go of our frugal ways or liquidate our retirement investments any time soon. While we have known those people who have relied on God's provision so much that they don't take the provisions they are offered when they do come, I think it safe that as simply grounding and comforting these words are, their practical impact for us remains a growing edge--at least in looking for the provision as a sure promise and not a fortunate revelation of hindsight. So how do we increase our trust in the promises of God that there will be enough, even when we live in a world where supplies seem so vanishingly short? The instruction 'not to worry', as important as it is, serves as much to remind us of the worries that we do have as it does to relieve us of them; kind of like saying 'don't look down' to someone who is afraid of heights almost always condemns the hearer to realize exactly how far up they really are.

This week we realized, again, just how mind boggling our universe is. We received the first images from the James Webb Space Telescope and we saw this. This is the first deep field image from Webb—A long exposure to meant to demonstrate what is even out there. Only this one was not particularly long as space images go, nor all that precisely placed. It is meant to echo the first deep field from Hubble, the last universe changing device in the sky. Only here as you can see the picture changes and we see far more than what we ever even expected or knew that was there. Thousands of whole galaxies pop into view spread over unimaginable dimensions of space and time. As the scientists are so fond of telling us, this image is looking at a piece of sand no greater than a grain of sand at arm's length. It is enough to make us feel mighty small relative to all of that. Either that or to simply sit there, mind blown, and say wow!

I don't go here to simply take the chance to geek out about the wonders of the world or the cool means we have to see and learn and know. For me, these pictures and those like them serve to remind me, yes of the utter unfathomable bigness of it all, but also the incredible mechanics of a universe that is built and operates with such provision and balance that the incredible is a daily occurrence. At the center of it all lies the God who reaches out time and again to provide what is needed even beyond the imaginations that we might have. When this God that brings this detail and variety of the whole of the universe comes and casts a tent, becomes incarnate with us, for us and with us, then we are placed with that universe and the delicate mechanism that provides what is needed—enough for today, and provision for tomorrow, what ever that tomorrow might look like. We saw this this week as many communities came together to celebrate Gavin's life—provision comes when it is needed in abundance, especially when it comes to the opportunity to show love, something we have all felt the desperate need of in these days. As much as we each would change the circumstances that makes this needed, if we could, we are also invited to share the amazement of the good that has come after and ensure that it continues.

Jesus turns us outward to consider the provision of God. Nature—both that of the grand universe and the simplicity of the birds of the air—allows us to re-frame the limited nature that we know so very well with the grander story of that which is going on around us. For it is here that we see that even within the struggle for survival also resides profound and unalterable ways that far exceed the requirements of mean necessity, but flow over into the category of profound excess and amazement when given the opportunity. I am sure that we many of us share

testimonies of been provided for: the experiences of hospitality, often of the poorest of the poor outshining that which we with means might provide. Of things coming together when logic and expectation, the hard facts of the matter told a story that would not end well. We need these stories; we need to realize them, we need to tell them, because there is so much of God's provision that we are given, if we are only provided the insight to recognize it for what it is, and to lodge the praise where it rightly and always belongs. It is a matter of properly and consistently rehearsing our ability to see, know, and rejoice in it. Appreciating and living in nature helps us to frame this truth. Hearing our stories also helps us normalize God's provision not as the extraordinary miracle, but as the regular course of the world around us.

For God's provision is always with us. The earth is being visited by life giving rain all the time, even if it does not happen to be where we would prefer. Growth of plant and tree continues unabated in even the most abused landscapes. Human need is being met in big and small ways by the moving, activating hand of God at work in God's people. The entire planet is provided with bounty and beauty for all people to share, for all people to prosper—all aspects of God's good work, God's good gifts. It is by God's provision that we are brought together, each to the other, to live, to eat, to work and to love. Yes, there are problems, yes there are inequities, yes there are worries to be had and taken seriously. There always have been, and there always will be. But there is also hope ever present as the rising sun, provision by the hand of God of needs and wants and promise in all things if we would but allow ourselves to see it at work around us.

There is an old philosophy story about this. It's a story of missing the point. Two travelers were driving the same road by horse and carriage on one clear, crisp, beautiful night. It was a road with all sorts of ruts, curves and bumps, offering plenty of obstacles to trip up a traveler. The rich man traveled with two new, bright lights on his carriage, creating a ball of light in which he felt safe, illuminating the road in front of him. Unfortunately, the light that created his security blocked his vision, and he could not see the moonlight, or the stars, or the shadows cast in the woods, making him completely unaware of what was going on around him. Had he taken the time to shade the lights, he could have seen what was going on, enjoying the spread of wonder before him. The other traveler was not so well to do and traveled only by what moonlight there was. He had a perfect view of the constellations and the pale moon, but was so preoccupied with the lack of light, the poor condition of the carriage, and the challenges that

could be around the next corner, that he too missed out on what was going on around him, squinting into the night, preoccupied with his fear of what might be. Both of them were distracted; one by what he had, the other by what he wanted, and they both missed the beauty provided them.

We are always balancing between the realities of our world, and the needs that do need to be met, day in and day out, in our lives and the lives of those around us and the real worries that they bring, and the reality of God's good and bountiful gifts given us with every heartbeat of our lives. The key here is knowing what is real, and where every gift and good comes from. We are called to but recognize God's present provision as part of the living kingdom, holding God's provision as the root of all that we are given, and all that we have, both in gratitude for what we have, and in reassurance that our future does not entirely rest on our shoulders alone. No matter what happens, God will be there. No matter what the need, God will provide for it. No matter what the worry, it lies, ultimately in the hand of the one who forms us, who moves us, and who will embrace us once again.

God has provided all that we need and continues to draw us together toward the day where worry will be no more. In this we live our faith, fully and faithfully. May we celebrate it fully, being granted the grace of gratitude in all things.