

## **Provision Beyond Expectation**

Menno Mennonite Church

July 14, 2024

**Purpose:** To embrace the practice of seeking the promise of God's provision.

**Message:** Jesus invites us into the practice of seeking the peace of the Kingdom, releasing the preoccupation with the worries of living.

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:25-34 (I will read); Psalm 8 (Secondary Text)

**Synopsis:** It is natural to worry. About everything. The world in which we live feels precarious. We are keyed to pondering what if, assuming that scarcity will be the rule of the day. Anxiety has become epidemic within our world as we worry through what if. While simply saying "stop it" doesn't effectively help us put these concerns to rest within us, Jesus reminds us where our provision does come from. He offers us a prioritization of our concerns: seeking the Kingdom as the pre-eminent concern above and beyond the day-to-day concerns of our life and living. When we maintain these proper prioritization of concerns, we better maintain the context of our true lives as being held within the hand of God.

*This is part of the Seeking Peace Together Series for the summer.*

## Matthew 6:24-34

<sup>24</sup> “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.

<sup>25</sup> “Therefore 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?

<sup>26</sup> 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?

<sup>27</sup> And can any of you            by worrying            add a single hour to your span of life?

<sup>28</sup> And why do you worry about clothing?

Consider the lilies of the field,  
how they grow; they neither toil nor spin,

<sup>29</sup> yet I tell you, even Solomon  
in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.

<sup>30</sup> But if God so clothes the grass of the field,  
which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven,  
will God not much more clothe you—you of little faith?

<sup>31</sup> Therefore do not worry, saying,  
‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’  
or ‘What will we wear?’

<sup>32</sup> For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things;  
and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

<sup>33</sup> But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness,  
and all these things will be given to you as well.

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

What worries do you carry? How long is your list of ‘what ifs’ that you carry? I am guessing that, were we inclined, we could spend the rest of the hour sharing our various lists of preoccupations. So present are our worries and concerns it doesn’t take a whole lot to get prime the pump to yield results. It has been observed that there is somewhat a characteristic of our time is that it is time of anxiety. This is for a whole lot of reasons: there are many uncertainties in our world, and we are more aware of the possibilities than ever before. The worries of life are not particularly new in this time. But we are still adjusting to living those worries in the context of a media world where everything that crosses our mind can be explored in far-too-graphic detail at the moment’s notice, often portraying the worst case scenarios more often than not. Think about it—before, you might wonder and consider something, and make some conclusions, but you wouldn’t have the data to enforce those ideas or not, at least until well down the line. Now the reinforcement is right in the palm of our hands. It takes a while for our brains to adjust to those circumstances of how we are and do think. I don’t think those ongoing transitions can be underestimated in their impact or their consequence. I think we do well to remember this.

Because it can feel a little bit disappointing to worry, really. There seems to be a bit of the expectation that being a person of faith precludes dealing with the worries of the day. The notions of let go and let God have deep roots in our expectations of how the spiritual life ought to be lived. There is an expectation that when we are accomplished spiritually we will somehow find our way out of worry and concern because we will fully live our creed that God is in control. Especially in the busiest times of the year when what we have is first and foremost a plate full of worries and concerns of how to just get done what must be done, and are honestly probably not spending a whole lot of time considering the grasses of fields unless it is pondering how they keep ending up where you want them least.

The worries of life are nothing new. They have been with us and real for time out of mind. There is no accident that this comes up for Jesus in speaking to how to live a life of and at peace. It shows that the human condition matters when it is brought into the realm of the Spiritual life. Yes; Jesus here places the worries and natural pre-occupations of the world in context relative to the concerns of the kingdom. But what he doesn’t say is the simplicity of “don’t worry”. Especially if you read the whole of the passage at length. There is no shame applied to tending the physicality of things—the whys and wherefores of how things might turn out in big and small ways. He asks the right questions: Does your worry accomplish anything

productive; might God hold concern for and with you based on what you already know about the world. All of these teaching techniques place worry into the framework of God's kingdom and God's provision, removing the ultimacy of worry—a great source of its power, the ability to convince us that there is no way that we would have the capacity to meet the challenges before and around us. Instead there is a modest suggestion of a change of focus: seek first the kingdom, then what comes next will come more naturally to your way and being in the world. All of this is classic, valuable, well loved stuff—trust God in all things and allow that to be your focus. All of this suggests a portrait of calm that we might feel well beyond our natural ability.

Which is why the way it all ends up is that much more startlingly. “Therefore, don't worry about tomorrow. Tomorrow will have enough worries of its own.” After all the sunny promises and peaceful demeanor of these words of trust—which is how we read them at any rate—we are brought starkly back to this. More or less trust and do not worry because tomorrow will be bad in its own special way. Excellent; thanks Jesus. And with that happy thought I can lay myself down to sleep with a new day to worry about.

It is not where we are expecting to wind up, but it is somewhere that is worth going to. It certainly puts a far more realistic edge on the advice Jesus was just giving. Jesus makes no differentiation between the statement of “trust in the Lord with all your heart” and saying “for life is often difficult” in the same breath. We don't always hear the advice this way because we shorten and sanitize it for easy consumption, opting for “consider the lilies” to suffice for the multitude of worries that it can represent. If we are looking for proofs of Jesus' practicality here I don't think there is much more that we need to say. Jesus is involving the spiritual in the messy everyday-ness of how we actually live and how we actually worry. We are given to expecting that the spiritual life is known when we are at our calmest, most collected best. That seeking the kingdom is a retirement project at best. This week did not go to plan—there were tires that blew up, plans that didn't come together and more hours on the road than I wish to consider, really. And the week is not yet over. It can be hard to feel Spiritual when we spend so much time preoccupied with what is now and screaming.

Yet Jesus says: let's be realists and be honest: most days are troubling and troublesome in one way or another. Things are not perfect. Life is not calm. The pace of our working life is not some vision of an eternal Sabbath. Some days we wonder how we'll make ends meet. Some nights we flop into bed and are chagrined to realize we went the whole day having prayed almost

not at all. Today has enough bad stuff as it is, Jesus said, and each of us knows deep in our bones that a truer word was never spoken. Even so, Jesus says, those are the days that your heavenly father is well aware of what you need and why. The life of discipleship and prayer does not take place outside the craziness of life and living but smack dab within it all that occupies us and keeps us a bit nuts. It is eminently practical, eminently true to life and there for truly and utterly hopeful as well.

Matthew 6 is a chapter about the spiritual life. It spends the first half of the chapter explaining *what* to pray—laying out the Lord’s prayer, and how to go about the devotional life of fasting and prayer. I tend to think that this latter half of the chapter is speaking to the why of prayer and how we can connect to God in these way. Likely you have prayed from little up, multiple times a day. Intentionally or not, we may have found our routine prayers around the table and at raising up. We don’t give a whole lot of thought to what we are doing and with whom we are conversing. Were it not from Jesus’ warm invitation to put us on parental basis with the YHWH God, we might be hesitant to talk at all, let alone address him as the divine parent we know and trust. But that’s the wonderful paradox at work here: we walk with and serve the Lord God, Maker of heaven and earth whose sheer grandeur and power are beyond imagination. Yet despite all of this majesty we believe that God cares for this tiny bit of cosmic real estate called earth. We hold that God knows and calls us each by name, from the inside out. We proclaim that God knows our needs and our desires, even in the maddening demands of our work-a-day world. We pray from the contexts of our regular lives, consciously and no, and we are invited to mention all that is ours to care about, even our worries, our anxieties and our fears.

Sometimes I think we misunderstand the peculiarity of this position and assume that our somewhat ad hoc style of prayer is the ordinary in the religious world. I can tell you it is not, especially here on the more open protestant end of the Christian spectrum. There is much we can learn from other traditions and cultures without reviling their practice. I remember working alongside a woman in a public place which was preparing to host a delegation of Muslims at a place telling the Amish and Mennonite Story. She was complaining about needing to find them space to honor their expected prayer ritual with some bitterness. After growing frustrated with her complaining I allowed myself to wonder out loud what Christianity might look like if it could manage even half that feat. There is much we can learn from other forms of devotion without compromising our own.

One thing that I think we need to understand as a difference is what prayer is for. We might have often seen meditative prayer and rituals that is meant to help us meditate out of our immediate concerns to reach a higher plane. While this is beneficial to help us center on that which is higher and bigger than ourselves and our immediate concern, that is not the form of prayer that we are invited to in God's way of peace. Christian prayer does not seek to transcend the thoughts and desires of the now, but invites us to bring that which is our ordinary and immediate and mundane thoughts to the divine context to allow them to reside with the one who cares for them right alongside. The point is not to escape and claim that these things are not of any consequence, but to rather seek the Kingdom of God first and foremost, grounded always in the certainty that the consequential stuff that comes clattering along with us so often even as we try to unclutter our minds is just a welcome as we are, but is held in the promise that it is God who cares about all the stuff that we do too. Christian prayer is unique in that it invites us to bring us—as we are, as we live, and all that we care about—and to allow it to rest within the divine other.

Jesus says that each day has enough trouble for itself. Sometimes trouble is big, bad, and bold. Other times it is just the busy of the day. But in Matthew 6, by telling us both that our heavenly Father sees us in these daily lives and by inviting us to pray about those same lives, Jesus asks us to look at even our distractions, even our interruptions, through new eyes. If this is the context in which, somehow or another, we are able to seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness, then that kingdom and that holy way of living is possible not by our breaking out of the routine but smack in the midst of it all. This is good news indeed and we are welcomed to bring US, and know that we are welcomed, even beyond our worries.

May this be our prayer and our way as we seek the kingdom and its righteousness well beyond our own. Amen.