PENTECOST 9, C – August 7, 2022

SCRIPTURES – Genesis 15:1-6; Heb. 11:1-16; Luke 12:22-34

*I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!* Luke 12

Do not be anxious! Do not worry! Well, you know something? That’s easy for Jesus. He’s God, after all! He knows what this day will bring, and what will happen tomorrow… and the day after that… and the day after that. He is not caught by surprise by an accident, or an illness, or a damaging storm. In fact, He is able by His almighty power to even control events and shape what will happen so that what He desires will be accomplished. This isn’t true for any of us! So, it’s easy for Jesus to say, ***“Do not be anxious about your life,”*** and to live without anxiety. It’s not so easy for us!

Who was Jesus talking to when He said this? He was talking to His disciples – *whom He would soon be leaving*. Boy, what a roller coaster of events and emotions they would experience shortly after He said this! First, they would see the most horrible of things: Jesus would be arrested; be put on trial and rejected by their nation’s leaders; and then be handed over to the Romans, who would crucify Him. Their leader and Messiah, whom they had looked for, *longed* for, for so long… their Master who had shown His power to deliver them from every difficulty and threat – hunger… disease… demons… even death itself – they would see Him executed and buried… taken away from them forever! Oh, the depths of grief and mourning into which they would be plunged!! But then, He would rise from the dead and return to them, and they would be raised to heights of joy that they had never before known!

*And then He would leave them.* He would ascend into heaven and they would never again see Him in this world. Alone and without Him they would have to face the uncertainties of this world, and the ongoing hostility of their nation’s leaders… and they were so few. How could they not be anxious? How can you not be anxious, when you also will soon be alone… will be without a pastor?

Thanks be to God, some very important things have changed since those days when Jesus said, ***“do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on.”*** True, inflation is making things more costly than they were, but life today for us is so much more secure. Few of us really have to worry about whether we’re going to have food to eat or clothes to wear. And, if you do have those worries, there are food banks and clothing drives and agencies and organizations to help. You wouldn’t find those in the 1st century. Above all, you have each other.

*“But, we’re so small, so weak!”* Yea, ours isn’t a big congregation with hundreds of members and support groups to help you to deal with all kinds of problems. Jesus’ disciples probably felt small and weak, also… especially after their nation’s leaders rose up against Jesus and had Him killed, and many of their fellow disciples abandoned Him out of the fear of their opposition.

Jesus knew all of this. He knew it better than any of them. He knows better than you what will come in the weeks and months ahead for you and for this congregation. And so, He called them – and calls us – to look at more than this; to open our eyes and see… God! ***“Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them.”*** God feeds them! He is filling our world and is working every day, even feeding birds… and you are of much more value to Him than they are! ***“Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet [not] even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed like one of these.”*** God clothes the grass, and every flower of the field! You are not alone. Your mighty God fills the world and tends it more carefully and faithfully than does a horticulturalist the plants in his greenhouse!

Open your eyes to see this. Believe this, for it is your Jesus who says this. Your Jesus, who told His disciples, ***“Whoever has seen me has seen [God] the Father. [For] I am in the Father and the Father is in me.”*** (John 14:9-10) Your Jesus:

* Who came down from heaven and became flesh, a human being like you, to be one with you.
* Who offered up His life to rescue you; to save you from God’s righteous punishment for your doubting Him, for your worrying and not believing Him.
* Who rose to life again from the dead, and bodily, to show God’s eternal care for the body and for life in the body; and not just for His own, but for yours. ***“Fear not, I am your shield, your very great reward,”*** God said to Abram. He gave him, not just things, but Himself! God gives Himself to everyone who believes Him, who considers Him true and trustworthy. He considers them righteous.

Your Jesus, who did all of these things for you, is the One who tells you that your God fills the world and tends it. And yes, after doing all of these things Jesus ascended into heaven – not to leave us, but to fill all things as the heavenly Father fills all things, and to feed and clothe and tend, not just plants, but *you*.

The world would have you believe that this is not so; that God, if He exists, is absent and uncaring, not present and active and working to help and save us. Isn’t there abundant evidence of God’s lack of care through the ages? Look at Noah. The number of believers had declined so much that only one family was left! And Abraham: blessed by God? He wandered around, not knowing where he was going, and never had a home of his own. And our Missouri Synod, celebrating 150 years… and declining. And yet, Jesus says, ***“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy.”*** Really? Are we that well off?

Yes, we are. For, our God is our Father, and He is pleased to give us His kingdom… Himself. He gave Himself to Peyton and Rowan this day, the water of their baptism rescuing them as the water of the flood rescued Noah and his family. And did they ask for this? Of course not! God was pleased to give Himself to them. In Holy Communion Jesus will give Himself to you this day, give His body to fill your body. Do not think that you have earned this or deserved this! He is pleased to give you Himself, and all that is His.

Even if you are of little faith, you are of faith! God is ***“your shield, your very great reward,”*** for your Jesus gives Himself to you! Do not be anxious, then, about this day or the next. Your Father knows what you need. Seek His kingdom, His Son. Do so by coming here, where He offers Himself to you in His Holy Word and Sacraments, and receiving Him. He will continually provide what you need: for yourself; for your family; for your church. He will help you to walk by faith, and not by sight, in the way that leads to eternal life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.