

OF CREATION

Matthew 6:25-34

Third Wednesday in Lent (Series C)

March 20, 2019

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The gospel lesson comes from *The Gospel According to Matthew*, chapter 6, verses 25 through 34. In this gospel lesson, Jesus teaches us that our Father in heaven cares enough about his creation to protect it. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Matthew 6, beginning at verse 25, we read in Jesus' name.

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. 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 which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁸ And why are you anxious 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 arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

³⁴ “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Sometime, later tonight, after you leave this place and go home, you're going to brush your teeth. Or, at least, I hope you do. Now, I've never really enjoyed brushing my teeth, but they say it keeps them from rotting and falling out, so I guess that's a good thing. Then you're going to turn a little lever, and cold, clean water is going to come out of a little pipe above your sink. You're going to drink it, and it's going to be very refreshing. Then you're going to crawl into a bed that is softer than a rock in a room that is warmer than twenty-seven degrees Fahrenheit. And I want you to think to yourself in that moment, *I don't deserve this.*

Maybe you already know this. Maybe you're just a kid, and everything you have has been given to you by your parents. You never had to work for it. You know you didn't earn it. Or maybe you're a grownup, and you're thinking, *What are you talking about? I worked hard my whole life to get a fancy electric toothbrush and a soft bed in my warm house. Who are you to say I don't deserve this?*

And from a strictly worldly perspective, you might be right. If you follow the rules and work hard, you can usually manage to earn a fairly decent life. That's the way the world works. And this is good; God designed the world this way. It incentivizes people to be productive and stay out of trouble, and this is good for everyone. So from a strictly worldly perspective, perhaps you

do deserve the comfortable life you enjoy. But that's not what I'm talking about. I'm not talking about comparing ourselves to other people around us. Whether or not we deserve something is not a matter of comparing ourselves to those around us and considering whether we have done more or less than what they have done to get what they have. The problem is that they are sinful too, so they don't make a very good standard.

I have a square at home—you know, the measuring tool that helps you make a perfect right angle when you're building something. I think quilters probably use them too. Anyway, the problem with this square is that it's not square. Its angle is probably about ninety-one degrees instead of ninety. It's kind of close, but it's not good enough. So for a long time I was very frustrated. I thought I was making straight cuts, but things just weren't fitting the way they were supposed to. And if I put this square on something that was already built, everything that was right looked wrong, and a few of the things that were wrong actually looked right.

That's what happens when we use other sinful people as a standard to measure ourselves by. If they're not right to begin with, we're not going to get an accurate measurement of ourselves. What we need is a true measurement. Whether you stack up as above or below average in comparison to your neighbor next to you is irrelevant to this discussion. What really matters to this discussion is God's standard, because God is the giver of all good things. So his Law is the standard by which we find ourselves righteous or sinful. His Law is the tool to determine whether or not we deserve what he gives to us. And when we measure ourselves according to this standard, none of us are found to be true. We don't deserve our toothbrushes, clean water, soft beds, warm homes, or any other good thing.

Now the point of this is not self-deprecation. That's when you run yourself down in hopes that other people won't. I do this sometimes, like when I build something that isn't square. Whenever I show something I made, I have a tendency to point out all the flaws before the other person has a chance to. My secret hope is that they'll say something like, "Oh, it's not that bad; I wouldn't have even noticed that." But sometimes it backfires and the person says, "You're right, I would have done a much better job." They're not getting the point of self-deprecation.

Sometimes it can kind of feel like self-deprecation when we confess our sins to God. We kind of think, *If I can just point out my sins before someone else does, then maybe God will go easy on me.* It's kind of like how it's harder to punish a person when they look really sorry, even if the punishment is just. If we beat up on ourselves enough, then maybe God will go easy on us.

But confessing our sinfulness is not about self-deprecation. It's simply about acknowledging the truth. And when we acknowledge the truth about ourselves—that we are by nature sinful and unclean—we see the magnitude of God's grace in comparison. It's really about glorifying God. When we acknowledge that God gives us all good things "purely out of fatherly and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me," we also realize that we are "in duty bound to thank, praise, serve, and obey Him."

It also teaches us not to worry, which is the point of the reading from Matthew. God cares for us. And he cares for the physical needs of our lives, not because we are righteous, but because God is love. He continues to love his creation to the extent that he sent his Son to suffer and die in order to redeem his creation. God is not willing to let his creation be lost, so he redeems it, and he will also preserve it.

This is the main point of the first article of the creed. "God has created me and all that exists." And not only is God the creator, he is also the protector of his creation. So remember

these two key verbs concerning the first article: “created” and “preserves.” This is the primary work of God the Father: he created, and he preserves.

I say this is his primary work, because it is not his only work, and he is not the only member of the Trinity involved in creating and preserving the world. The Son and the Holy Spirit are also involved.

The creed is divided into three articles. The easiest way to label these articles is according to the three persons of the Godhead: “God the Father Almighty,” “Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord,” and “the Holy Spirit.” But we can also divide them according to the primary work of the three persons. This is what the catechism does with them. Instead of labeling the first article as being about the Father, it labels it according to the Father’s work: “Of Creation.” And with the second article, instead of labeling it as being about the Son, it labels it according to the Son’s work: “Of Redemption.” And instead of labeling the third article as being about the Holy Spirit, it labels it according to the Holy Spirit’s work: “Of Sanctification.”

Each member of the Trinity has their own way in which they bless us with gifts, but they don’t do it completely independent of one another. For example, with creation, we read that the Holy Spirit was hovering over the face of the waters (Gen. 1:2). And we also read that God created by speaking. This Word, through which God called the creation into existence, is identified in *The Gospel of John* as being the Son (1:3). So the creation was a Trinitarian activity, but we recognize it as being the Father’s primary work.

We learn a few things about the world from the creation narrative. Perhaps the most basic thing we learn is that God created everything. And second to that, we learn that it is good. Everything God created was good (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). And when the creation was completed on the sixth day, we learn that it was “very good” (Gen. 1:31).

Of course, it is also true that the world has not remained this way. It was “subjected to futility” (Rom. 8:20) upon the fall into sin (Gen. 3). This, however, does not mean that the creation became bad. It is still good, but it was corrupted. And human beings continue to bear the image of God, but in a corrupted sense. In a very general way, we can even say that human beings are good. You might be a little surprised to hear me say that, because I usually tell you what sounds like the opposite: that we are by nature sinful and unclean.

Biblical anthropology—that is, the doctrine of mankind—consists of two basic truths that seem to contradict each other, but, in fact, do not. The first basic truth is this: that we are, in one sense, good by virtue of being created by God. The second basic truth is that we are also evil, because our wills are by nature hostile to God.

The fall into sin corrupted us at the deepest level and turned our hearts away from God, but it did not take away the value of a human being. Corrupt as we may be, we are still God’s creatures. Your physical body, even though it doesn’t work as well as God designed, is still good. Even if your body suffers from severe disability, we still confess it to be good, because God created it. It is one of his gifts to you.

Your mind is also good. Now, our minds are where we commit most of our sins. We are constantly sinning with our minds, and this is bad. And sometimes our minds fail at their basic functions. We forget things we are supposed to remember, like birthdays and dentist appointments. And sometimes our minds confuse basic facts or they perform logical functions incorrectly, so that we are absolutely certain that something completely false is actually true.

Despite being corrupted, our minds are still a gift of God to us, and they are still good. Everything good we have is a gift from God, and that is why it is good.

When we think about the goodness of creation, and the goodness of our bodies, we can be tempted to go astray by thinking that something is good as long as it performs some beneficial function. The idea is, *Yes, my brain commits sins, but it still performs some good functions, therefore it is good.* This idea is actually wrong. It reverses the order of goodness and function. Something is not good because it performs a beneficial function. Rather, it performs a beneficial function because it is good. Do you see the difference? The goodness and value of our bodies and minds—or anything in creation for that matter—does not come from the beneficial function it provides. So even if it ceases to perform a beneficial function, it is still good, because God created it.

This is especially true for human beings. A human being is valuable because he or she is created in the image of God. Some human beings may perform more beneficial functions than other human beings. This is just obvious. But that does not make those human beings more valuable. The world thinks this way. The world interprets function as value. That's why, in order to ensure that one class of person is just as valuable as another class, they have to be able to do all the same things. This just doesn't work. Often times, this places an unreasonable burden on people, and it actually makes them feel less valuable when they discover that they can't do all the things another person can do. Your value as a human being does not come from what you do. Your value as a human being comes from the fact that you are created in the image of God.

Your value also does not come from whether or not someone else wants you. This is another place where the world has gone tragically wrong. At various times, and in various places, the world has allowed people to be killed, simply because someone else doesn't want them. Sometimes it happens to the elderly. Sometimes it happens to people with disabilities. In our part of the world, it is happening by the millions to unborn babies. Words cannot express how tragic this is. Part of the tragedy is that people involved in this, mostly mothers, have been deceived into thinking this is okay, or perhaps even good. We have to call this a sin, but we can also be understanding of their circumstances when we call them to repentance. As far as the moral question goes, the key is to recognize that all human beings are created in the image of God and are, therefore, valuable.

I suspect that this little part of this little sermon is not going to change the public policy of an entire nation. That's not my goal. These words are intended for you. Abortion is typically a very secret matter. But, given the fact that our nation has averaged about a million a year for several decades now, words don't have to travel far to find the ear of someone who has an experience with abortion or will someday consider it. So these words are for you. If you have committed this sin, repent. Confess your sin, and receive God's forgiveness through the blood of Christ. And if you ever find yourself considering it, remember that every human being is created in the image of God, and that is where their value comes from. Every human being is created in the image of God, and that is where our value comes from.

God cares for every human being. And this, of course, includes you. You are created in his image. Therefore, you are valuable. He cares for you. He created you. He guards and keeps you.

God cares for all of his creation. He did not create the world, wind it up like a watch, and let it go. Our Father in heaven is intimately involved in every aspect of his creation. This is what Jesus teaches us in the gospel lesson. Our heavenly Father has millions and millions of pet birds. And he feeds them all. **“Are you not of more value than they?”** (6:26). Indeed, you are. If God

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cares for the birds of the air, and if he even cares about how the lilies in the field are clothed, will he not also care for you? God cares for every little detail of his creation, but he does not get lost in the details. He still has his priorities straight. He still remembers that he created you in his image.

Though hardship and pain will come in this life, your Father sees you, and he cares. He will always set a limit to what evils may come your way. He created you. He sent his Son to redeem you. He will protect you all the days of your life on this earth. And he will bring you into his eternal kingdom. He does all of this, “without any merit or worthiness in [us],” but “purely out of fatherly and divine goodness and mercy.” Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.