

9.24.2017 Trinity 15 (Matthew 6:24-34)

We've probably all read stories about people who have won huge lottery jackpots, or we've seen the TV commercials from Publisher's Clearing House that show the happy people who won \$5,000 a week for life. Well, imagine for a moment that you were the winner of a huge giveaway, but after reading the fine print, you discover the terms and conditions attached to claiming this prize are quite specific. Here's how it works: What you've won in this giveaway is a very unique bank account. A personal account that receives an \$86,400 deposit every morning when you wake up. Now, you can spend this money any way you would like, but the first rule states: You have to spend the money. You can't transfer it into another account or save any portion for retirement. The money must be spent, and any amount that you don't spend on that day you will lose. And there's one more thing: The person managing this contest, the one who deposits \$86,400 into your account every morning, has the right to close that account at any time, and without any notice. So, you have no idea when this amazing giveaway will end.

If you won that contest today, where would you be tomorrow morning? At the bank, right? Impatiently waiting to make that first withdrawal, so that you could get busy spending every last dollar. Imagine the things you could do and the people you could bless with such an amazing gift!

We don't often recognize it, but truthfully, every morning when we wake up, we receive a gift far more valuable than any amount of money. As the prophet Jeremiah declares: *"It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning..."* (Lamentations 3:22-23). This morning, and every morning, God gives us a new day. He blesses us with the gift of life, and another 86,400 seconds to spend on this earth. In many ways, the time that God gives us is similar to that \$86,400 prize. The first rule of that contest stated: You have to spend the money. Similarly, the time God blesses us with must be spent today. We can't put time in a bottle or transfer it into another account. We can't save for tomorrow any portion of the time that God gives us today, it must be spent, or lost. And, once again, there's one more thing: God is the Omnipotent Author of Life. It is the LORD that gives, and the LORD that

takes away (Job 1:21). Our lives are in His hands, and no one knows when their time on this earth will end (Ecclesiastes 9:12).

So, you've been presented with two scenarios. The first is a fictitious, daily cash giveaway that could come to an end at any time, and the second is the truth that Almighty God is the Author of life, He gives us this day, our daily bread, and no one knows when their time on this earth will end. Now consider how these two scenarios relate to our second lesson. When you read that lesson, the relevance of Jesus' words in our day and in our culture is remarkable. He spoke these words almost two thousand years ago to a group of people living in the Middle East, yet in this passage Jesus is speaking about the most common type of mental disorder in our society. An illness that affects nearly 30 percent of adults at some point in their lives, which means that right now tens of millions of Americans are suffering under the weight of this affliction (source: American Psychological Association). The affliction is anxiety. In these ten verses, six times Jesus repeats this phrase: "take no thought." The phrase "take no thought" simply means don't be anxious. In this passage He says to the people standing in front of Him, and to us, "*Be not anxious for your life... which of you by being anxious can add one cubit unto the measure of his life... why are ye anxious concerning raiment... Be not therefore anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed... Be not therefore anxious for the morrow: for the morrow will be anxious for itself.*"

Anxiety is the most common mental illness in the United States, and clearly this illness was just as common in that time and in that culture. God knows that too many of His children struggle to live abundant lives today, because of fear or worry about tomorrow. Jesus said that He came "*to heal the brokenhearted*" (Luke 4:18), and so, in this passage, He confronts this affliction. He shines His light and His truth into the darkness revealing the root cause of anxiety, and then offers the remedy. Listen to how the passage begins: Jesus said, "*No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon*" (Matthew 6:24). The word "mammon" is a Syriac word meaning riches or wealth. So, Jesus is saying that no man can be the servant of God, and the servant of money.

Jesus isn't saying that having money, even a lot of money, is sinful. The Patriarchs of the Old Testament (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) were all blessed by God with great wealth. The Bible describes King David as a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22) and one that "*died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honor*" (1 Chronicles 29:28). In Joseph of Arimathea we see a disciple of Jesus who was very wealthy. There is nothing wrong with having money. What is wrong, and what Jesus is addressing, is to turn wealth into a false god by allowing the almighty dollar to be our lord and master - the one in which we place our faith, the one we trust to take care of our needs, the one we serve. "*No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon*" (Matthew 6:24). And why would you want to? It could only lead to anxiety.

Who could help but be anxious if their faith was placed in money, for we've all seen examples of people who lose it all. In fact, speaking of huge lottery jackpots, multiple studies reveal the truth that about 70 percent of lottery winners end up going broke and filing for bankruptcy. Placing our faith in ourselves isn't a comforting option either, for we are all intimately familiar with our own personal weaknesses and failures. The man after God's own heart, David, said it well in Psalm 51:3, "*I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.*" Think about it like this, if you want to add a measure of anxiety to your life, imagine placing your faith in yourself, and on the day of judgment standing before Almighty God, the Infinite, Holy Maker of Heaven and Earth, pleading your own cause and relying on your own merit to enter into heaven. Just the thought of it makes my chest tighten and my heart race. If we place our faith in money, if we place our faith in ourselves or our own good works, if we place our faith in anything that can fail or be taken from us, we will always struggle with anxiety.

Jesus knows this is true, and so, He offers the remedy. He said, "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you*" (Matthew 6:33). This is the remedy that Jesus offers to all those who feel anxious or are troubled by anything: "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness,*" place your faith in Him - and only Him, put your life where it belongs - in His hands, trust God to meet your every need "*and all these things shall be added unto you.*" The remedy Jesus

offers brings us back to where this sermon began. When we are anxious about anything, we are failing to recognize the truth that Almighty God is the Giver, and every day is a gift. He is the Author of Life. Our lives are in His hands, and to seek first His kingdom, and His righteousness, is to place our faith in Him, and to ask Him to be the Author of our story. Fear, worry, and anxiety all lose their power when we trust that God is writing the story of our lives. He completed the first chapter when He knit each one of us together in our mother's womb (Psalm 139:13), and He completed the last chapter on the Cross. We don't know what will happen between now and forever, but when we look to the Cross, we see the depth of God's love, and we know that the One "*who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all*" (Romans 8:32), is (in every circumstance) doing better things for us than we could ever ask or imagine.