**Stewardship Sunday – Christ’s Love, Our Calling: Called to be Content**

 **August 19, 2012 – Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY**

**Based on Proverbs 30:5-9 written by Pastor Paul Horn**

**“Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread…”**

When you are a little boy or a little girl, one of the best places to be on God’s green earth is in the kitchen of your grandmother… the smells, the treats, the warm smiles of satisfaction from grandmother watching her grandchild. In my grandmother’s kitchen hung a painting of an elderly, white bearded man seated at a rough, wooden table, wearing a heavy flannel jacket, elbows on table, hands folded, hands on forehead, eyes closed, his eye glasses neatly folded on his Bible, one loaf of bread, a knife, and a small bowl of soup. When I think about that painting, I can’t help but wonder, “Is this all this man can afford? If so, look at him. He still bows his head in prayer.” What is he praying? I’d like to think he’s thanking his Father for what he has, whether it be a little or much. It seems to be enough. He seems to be content with his daily bread.

Our lesson this morning is from the book of Proverbs. Proverbs are by definition short, compact statements that express a truth about human behavior. The Proverbs in the Bible are written about life issues in light of a right relationship with God. As God’s children, here are little tid-bits of advice as you live your Christian life. Today’s proverb is from chapter 30.

The author begins by saying, “While I am living, two things I ask of you, LORD: **Keep falsehood and lies far from me.”** (vs7-8) Don’t let lies fall from my lips. Allow me to speak the truth. Secondly, “**Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread.”** What is that? Because we pray for it every day in the Lord’s Prayer. Daily bread is everything I need for my body; food and drink, clothes, and a shelter from elements; these things will preserve my body and allow me to continue living. We’re praying not for cake and ice cream, but bread, the necessities of life. With that petition we are putting our trust in our gracious Father in heaven to provide what we need for our bodies. The Apostle Paul captures our attitude as we pray that petition when he wrote, “**We brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.”** (1Tim 6.7,8)

But the author knows the weaknesses of his sinful self, and so he prays, **“Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, “Who is the LORD?”**

Is your daily bread more than enough? Let’s put it into perspective… Do you have to walk to the farmer’s market every day to get your fresh fruits and vegetables or do you simply have to walk to the refrigerator or pantry and have a variety of items to choose from? Do you have to go to the barn and slaughter a cow or pig today or walk to your freezer and pull out one package of frozen hamburger meat (of the many that are in there)? Do you own a car? Do you have more than two sets of clothes in your dresser and closet? Then you are part of the world’s richest 20%. Even if you are among the poorest of Americans, you are still richer than 68% of the world’s population – that’s richer than 4.7billion people. You are all wealthy individuals.

What if your daily bread is more than enough? Maybe you’re someone who doesn’t worry about money or paying the bills, you can invest for your retirement, you can go on a vacation without taking out a loan, you can tackle a home improvement project without breaking the bank… **“I may have too much and** **disown [the LORD] and say, “Who is the LORD?”** It’s not a sin to be wealthy or have lots of money, but the temptation is there to forget who gave you that wealth. The temptation is that I see no room in my life for my God or his Word, because I think that I have everything I need. But then I would lose the riches of heaven. I would forfeit my soul for earthly treasures which rust and break and can be stolen by thieves, which cannot be taken with us when we die.

**“Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Or I may become poor and steal and so dishonor the name of my God.”** What does that mean that someone is poor? Is it comparative, they feel that they don’t have what so many others have and that makes them poor? Are they poor because their income is so low or because they have so much debt most of their income goes to paying off creditors? Regardless, if I am poor, the temptation is there to steal. I can steal from my employer and add some minutes or hours to the timecard that I didn’t work. I can steal from my government and not report all of my earnings, besides, God will understand that I need it more than they do. Even if I’m on a fixed income, I can steal from my God and not give anything to him with my offerings because he knows I need it for my bills. If I am poor then I may begin to resent those who have more than I do, then I may become greedy and question God and ask, “Why do they have more and I have less?” Then I dishonor God’s name, because I don’t trust him to provide for me. I dishonor God’s name by not being content with his blessings to me.

Do you have difficulty saying that prayer – “**Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread**.” Part of me wants to be that man in the painting, completely content with just my daily bread. The other part of me wants to be sitting at a large table with crystal stemware filled with the finest wine and plates filled with food, steak and chicken and baked potatoes and a chocolate mousse, and I’d be wearing something nicer than an old flannel jacket. Would you be content if you just had enough? Or would you rather pray, “Don’t give me poverty, but give me riches and then I’ll not have to worry.” Is God satisfied with that kind of living on the part of his people? No. God is not satisfied when he sees this behavior, because he demands that we be perfectly content, that we trust him wholly to provide our daily bread.

Do you remember when Jesus was in the wilderness, being tempted by Satan? And at the end of those 40 days of temptation Jesus was hungry because he was fasting. Satan came up to him and said, “**Since you’re the Son of God, turn these stones into bread.”**  Do you remember how Jesus replied? He said, **“Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”** What was Jesus saying there? He was saying, “I could do this, but I don’t need to. To do so would be a selfish use of my divine powers. I will trust my Father to provide.” And Jesus lived that way his entire life. He was always content, always thankful for his daily bread. Always trusting in his Father to provide for him. This life satisfied the Father’s demand for a perfect life from us. At your baptism, the Holy Spirit covered your life with Jesus’ righteousness. When the Father looks at you he doesn’t see your sins. He sees his Son and his life.

Not only did Jesus satisfy his Father’s demands for a perfect life, but also satisfied God’s wrath over our sins. A couple of Sundays ago we sang “In Christ Alone.” And many members expressed their joy in singing that hymn. I asked them why they enjoyed it. Some said, “The tune was snappy.” I asked them, “Why else did you like it?” Others replied, “Because the text is so rich.” In that second stanza we sang, “On that cross, as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied; for every sin on him was laid. Here in the death of Christ I live.” We say that by his sacrifice Jesus made propitiation for us. He turned God’s wrath away from us, and directed it toward himself, by heaping the sins of all of us and all people upon himself, the stealing, the discontent, the greed, the worrying, and so God’s wrath burned against his Son, so that it would never burn against us. Because he accomplished this propitiation for us, and we as baptized children of God receive it through faith, the Father looks on us with favor, and has forgiven you.

Because Jesus loves you so much he gives you his body and blood to eat with this bread and wine. With it he promises that one day he will take us to a place where we will never be in want, we will never go without… where we will drink from River of Life and never be thirsty, we will eat from Tree of Life and never be hungry, and live forever.

When I listen to God’s Word, and this rich promise he has made to me, then I want to be that man in the painting. I want to pray with confidence, “Give me neither poverty nor riches but give me only my daily bread.” When I listen to God’s richness to me then I will not worry, but I will trust my gracious Father in heaven to provide for my needs and those under my care. I’ll pay attention to Jesus as he sits on the mountain pointing to the birds and the lilies of the field saying, “Look! I feed and clothe them. I’ll do the same for you.” Yes, Jesus. I know that you will. When I listen to God’s richness to me then I will learn St. Paul’s secret of being content, whether well fed or hungry. He gave the secret away, didn’t he? “I can do all things through him who gives me strength.” (Philippians 4) I will be content with what I have, through him who strengthens me through his Word and Sacrament.

When I think of that painting of that elderly man, I am reminded of what my grandparents taught me. They lived that way – trusting their Father in heaven when they prayed, “Give us today our daily bread.” They gave generously to their church, my grandmother was passionate about mission work, and her giving to missions proved that, even though they were on a fixed income. They never worried about their income. They made God’s Word their priority. They prayed together at the kitchen table every morning, read their *Meditations* devotion book every morning, sat in the same pew every Sunday morning. They lived this proverb, “Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread.” Yes, dear Father in heaven, we will trust you to provide. Amen.