**Summer sermon series: The Apostles’ Creed - June 24, 2012 – Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY**

**Based on Matthew 6:25-34 written by Pastor Paul Horn**

**“Your Father provides… so do not worry. Instead, seek first his kingdom”**

What would you do… if you lived in the town of Homs, Syria today, where your government has just bombed your city, killing its own citizens and leaving you to die, cut off from food and water and medical supplies? The International Committee of the Red Cross is currently the only international aid agency operating in Syria - still waiting to enter Homs, where it is believed hundreds of people, many of them wounded in recent shelling by the military, are trapped. What would you do to survive? What would you do to provide food and shelter and clothing for your family?

What if you were the prophet Elijah (from our First Lesson today 1Kings 17) – the LORD has told you, “There will be no rain for three and a half years.” Go live by this brook where I’ve ordered ravens to feed you.” Ok… The brook dries up. The LORD says, “Go to this town. There a widow will supply you with food.” Ok… widows don’t have food… typically. The husbands worked and provided for the family. How is she supposed to feed both of them? And then the prophet arrives and she says, “I don’t have any food.” Notice that Elijah never complains, never questions, never doubt. He trusts his heavenly Father to provide for him.

God doesn’t operate that way today. He doesn’t speak to us directly and says, “This is how I will provide for your bodily needs.” But he gives us his promises in his Word and says, “I will provide for your bodily needs.” In Martin Luther’s catechism we learn how our heavenly Father provides for us. As the maker of heaven and earth he cares for his creatures. First of all he provides for them in miraculous ways, like he did with Elijah, or when Jesus fed 5,000 men with a handful of fish and bread (in addition to all of the women and children who were present), or how he provided food and water for the Israelites in the desert. We also are taught that the Father provides through natural means. He sends water to the earth through rain and snow. He causes the plants to grow and bear fruit. Our Father also gives us the abilities and skills to work and earn our food and clothing and shelter. The lesson that Jesus will teach you today from Matthew 6 is this: “Your father provides - so seek first his kingdom and do not worry.”

Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount is loved by many Christians. There he gives us the Beatitudes. He teaches us the Lord’s Prayer. In our lesson today he had just finished teaching his disciples about money and possessions. He said, **“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth.”** They are transitory, instead, **“Store up treasures in heaven,”** the spiritual treasures of Christ and his Word… those treasures will endure for eternity, **“Therefore,”** he says in our lesson, “**do not worry about your life, your clothes, food, drink or house**.” Since God provides treasures that will endure for eternity - forgiveness of all your sins, heaven, salvation from sin, death and the power of the devil - will he not also provide you with transitory things such as food and drink, clothing and a home?

You can picture Jesus sitting there on the mountain, as he points to some birds flying overhead, “Look, they’re not planting seeds in a field. They are not harvesting grain. They don’t punch a time clock. They are not building barns to store food. And yet your Father feeds them. Aren’t you more valuable than these birds? Won’t your Father feed you, too?” You can picture Jesus pointing to the flowers and the grass on the hillside, “Look, they do not have jobs they work at. They do not spin, that is, they do not make clothes. Yet they are dressed more beautifully than King Solomon in all of his splendor. Your Father clothes the grass of the field with such beauty, which tomorrow will be picked and used to burn in the oven for cooking food. Aren’t you more valuable and more important than this grass? If your Father in heaven clothes these flowers with this beauty, won’t he do that for you, too?”

**“Therefore,”** Jesus commands, **“do not worry.”** Five times Jesus uses that same word, **worry**… “Besides,” Jesus says, “who of you by worrying about your life can add a cubit to your height?” (a cubit was the span of elbow to the fingers). You can’t. In fact worrying probably causes you to shrink! “Who can add an hour to your life by worrying?” In fact worrying probably shortens your life span! “**Besides**,” Jesus says, “**today has enough trouble of its own**.” No need to stress about tomorrow. “**Your Father knows what you need**.” He will provide.

Jesus then contrasts us with the unbelievers, “You know who worries about food and clothes and this life?

The pagans, the heathen - they chase after material goods. That’s all they do in life. Who can have the best and the most and the latest and greatest gadgets and toys? But you’re not like that.” Jesus commands us, **“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”** Jesus commands us do not to be consumed by material possessions and money, because he knows that if we are anxious and concerned about the things of this life we will be distracted from his kingdom work. **“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness…”** What does that look like? It’s your daily study of Scripture, an active worship and Bible study habit – and these things lead to Godly wisdom, to an understanding of Scripture, which leads to humility, and trust in Jesus’ promises, growth in Christian living, a faith that firmly clings to Christ’s life and death and resurrection, a faith that holds on to the hope of eternal life and does not waver – make these treasures your priority in life - those treasures last. And your Father will take care of the rest. He will make sure you have what you need – food, clothing, and shelter.

**“Do not worry.”** And yet what have many of us done this morning already? You worried about something didn’t you? The health of loved one, your own health, a relationship that is a little rocky, your to-do list, your job or need for one… We’re coming up on the first of month and you will be looking at your budget. Will you worry? And our Father tells us, “Take your cares and concerns to me in prayer,” but we go on fretting about it and get stressed out.

Jesus said, “**Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness**,” yet what do many of us do? We spend more time paging through Facebook, Craigslist and the Sunday morning newspaper ads than we do the pages of our Bibles. We spend more time figuring how we can get the latest and greatest and newest gadgets and toys planning what we want to do first rather than figuring out what God wants me to do and how I can use my time and resources to serve him.

Jesus told story about a farmer who was planting seeds in his field. Some of the seeds fell among the thorns and weeds, and as the plant grew up the weeds and thorns choked that plant and it died. Jesus explained that the seed is the Word of God. It is planted in the soil of our hearts. That seed of faith grows but Jesus explained when we allow this life’s worries, riches, pleasures, concerns to grow with our faith, our faith is choked by the weeds of life’s worries and will kill it.

Our anxiety and fear are keeping pharmaceutical companies in business, but more seriously, they choke our spiritual bodies, so that they grow weak and are in danger of dying altogether. You see, when we are afraid of the future, it says to our Father, “I don’t trust you. I don’t believe that you are going to do what you promised me in your Word.” When we concern ourselves with chasing after the material things of this world more than eternal treasures, it says to our Father, “I believe the things of this world are more important to fuss about than heavenly things.” Jesus said, “The unbelievers behave this way.” I don’t know about you, but that makes me say, “Lord Jesus, forgive me for my unbelief.”

Some folks like to play music when they are down and depressed, when they are anxious and concerned about life. What we could do this morning is have our sound technician play “Don’t Worry, Be Happy,” by Bobby McFerrin. Would that make you feel better about yourself this morning? Jesus does much more than make you feel good. He shows you how he has saved you and me from our unbelief. God has commanded us, “Do not worry.” Did Jesus do that himself? From your readings of scripture can you recall a time when Jesus ever worried about his body, his clothes or food, where he would sleep at night? Never. In your reading of Scripture can you remember the times when Jesus made his Father’s Word his top priority in life? All the time! Do you remember a time when Jesus completely trusted his Father’s promise? Yes, especially the promise his Father made to him, “Son, your life and death will save these people from their unbelief.” So Jesus confidently marched to the cross. Jesus also trusted his Father’s promise to bring his dead body back to life after his death. Yes, Jesus always and completely trusted his Father’s promises in life and in death.

By that perfect, complete trust, Jesus has taken away any anger that the Father might have over your lack of faith and trust in him. The Father looks down at his Son and sees that he, in your place, has lived with perfect trust. His Son has lived with a perfect concern for his Father’s kingdom and living according to his righteousness. By washing you with water and the word the Father has covered over your life of worry with Christ’s life of trust. By your baptism the Father has dressed you in a robe more beautiful than the prettiest flower of the field – the robe of Christ’s righteousness.

Father provides all this for you. Will he not also provide you with what you need for your body? Doesn’t he know what you need? He does. He will provide for you. He has made that promise to you today. Your Father provides for you. So do not worry. Instead, seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. What does that look like? It can begin with prayer, a prayer life that trusts the Father who says in his Word, **“Cast all your anxieties and cares on me because I care for you.**” (1Peter 5) Share your fears with your Father, and then let them go, and put it in his Fatherly hands. Seek first God’s kingdom. What does that look like? In the last class I took through “Foundations of our Faith”, even before we were done with the class, most of the members of the class had purchased self-study Bibles and were giddy with excitement over this new habit they were ready to try. It was called “daily personal Bible reading.” That’s seeking first his kingdom. A young gal sat in my office this week and told me how she was applying for a new position at her job, but she had requested Sundays off. A family member had questioned her and said, “Won’t that hurt your chances?” To which she replied, “I need to be in church on Sunday. That’s more important to me.” I was speaking to a member this week who has to get up at 4 or 5am every morning for work. But she wakes up an extra 10-15minutes earlier so she can sit down with her *Meditations* devotion book and have her God speak to her through his Word. That’s seeking first his kingdom.

My friends, your Father provides for you. So do not worry, instead, seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Amen.