

On Seeking

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost; Series C

Luke 12:22-34 (35-40)

Caught in the middle of Monterey Jack and the mission. This is where the character Monty of the popular cartoon, Chip N' Dale Rescue Rangers repeatedly found himself throughout many of the show's episodes. He loved cheese! Hence, his nickname, "Monty," after his favorite type of cheese, Monterey Jack. I remember watching this show with my brothers a lot as a child. Perhaps many of you are familiar with the cartoon as well. I remember shaking my head many times in disbelief at the trouble that Monte would find himself in because of his obsessive love for cheese.

Monte and his rescue ranger sidekicks would be in the middle of a dangerous but important mission when all of a sudden it would happen. Monte would catch a whiff of Cheddar, Swiss, Colby, or Monterey Jack cheese. He would stop in his tracks and his nose would lead him to the cheese, most of the time with his feet lifted off of the ground and his whole body levitating in mid-air! Cheese, it was his great weakness. His obsession with the dairy product often left his team short-handed and unable to effectively carry out their mission. Monte was consumed, absorbed, and immersed in what he desired most. He was overcome by what he could see, touch, smell, and taste. His relentless seeking after cheese led him to compromise the more important thing, the mission.

Caught in the middle. Jesus knows that this is where you and I are as his disciples. He knows that we live in this world where health, wealth, prosperity, superiority, and status are attractive things to seek after. They are the tangible things, like Monte's cheese, that capture our sense of smell, touch, taste, and sight. We also live in this world as citizens of the reign of God and the kingdom of heaven. And we have Jesus' words from the Gospel reading ever before us, "And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you" (Lk 12:29-31). We are caught in the middle in a struggle between seeking the things of this world and seeking the things of the kingdom of God in this world.

How might this be? Well, it's Saturday night and you have an opportunity to go to someone's house for a get together to celebrate a holiday. You have a good time at the celebration and socialize with a number of friends. You play games and eat a lot of snacks. But you don't stay too late because you have somewhere important to be the next morning. You want to make certain to keep your priorities straight. The next morning rolls around and you make your way to Church for the Sunday morning Divine Service and Bible Study to follow. You come to hear the Gospel in the Service of the Word and to receive his body and blood for the forgiveness of sins in the Service of the Sacrament. You come to continually seek to know God as your Heavenly Father more in these ways and in the Bible Study afterwards. You try faithfully to live in the tension of living in this world but seeking the things of the kingdom of God and his reign in this world. The fact that you and I as believers in Christ are here this morning shows our desire to "seek first the kingdom of God."

Let's consider another scenario. It's Wednesday evening toward the end of the month and you just finished dinner with the family and are now taking the time to go through the finances. You calculate the total of your living expenses and

look at the stack of bills and receipts next to you and start to feel that ache in your stomach. You know that you have budgeted well. You know that you have been disciplined with your finances. But it seems like the cost of every bill just keeps rising and the number on your paycheck is just not keeping up. The anxiety and worry starts to well up inside you and you start to feel flush. "This is just too tight," you think to yourself as you shake your head in doubt and disbelief. You follow that statement up with, "How is this ever going to keep working?" In that moment the worry and the anxiety like the wafting fragrance of cheese floats past you and draws you to resolve the uncomfortable tension. The worry and anxiety says with seeming innocence, "Just keep following me and things will get better."

Meanwhile, in our worry and anxiety about the bills and the finances we find ourselves distracted. We devote less attention to the kids and the wife. We are short-tempered and easily angered. We decide to sacrifice that precious family time by searching for a moonlighting gig because one job is making us feel too uncomfortable.

You and I are constantly becoming anxious about our needs in this world and the material things. It affects not just us but it affects those around us, our family members, friends, co-workers, and church members. Even as we seek the kingdom of God we catch ourselves relentlessly seeking the things of this world through worry and anxiety.

As children of our Heavenly Father and disciples of the faithful Son, Jesus Christ, we daily live in the tension of seeking the things of the world and the things of the kingdom of God. Worry and anxiety lead us to be concerned primarily about what we can see, touch, taste, and smell. At the same time we are the baptized, believing children of God, our Heavenly Father. We are in Christ and in the Spirit. We have the Spirit of God living in us to help us follow the desires of God and "seek first his kingdom," trusting that our faithful Father will provide all else that we need. And so we live, by grace through faith, "in the middle."

Living in the middle of Monterey Jack and the Mission of God, we might say. Take comfort in the truth that God maintains and sustains you as you live in the middle of the tension of "seeking the things of the world" and "seeking the kingdom of God." Toward the end of our Gospel reading Jesus told his disciples, "Sell all your possessions and give to the needy." While Jesus is using the literary device of hyperbole or exaggeration to make a point about what his disciples ought to be seeking first, there is a profound message of Good News for us in Jesus' statement.

You can live faithfully in this world in the tension and struggle between seeking first earthly things and heavenly things because God, your faithful, loving Father decided in love and faithfulness to "sell all and give to the needy." In the fullness of time, at the proper time, he sold his treasured possession, his firstborn Son, because he counted you of such great worth. He wanted to give you a share of his eternal kingdom. So he gave over his Son, the King, to die the death for Sin that you deserved to die and to put to death the power of the Monte within us all to eternally hurt and harm us. We were in need of pardon and forgiveness in order to be included in the kingdom. And so our God "sought first the kingdom" for us. His Son rose to a new life of seeking first the kingdom of God. Now you are united to a death like his and a resurrection like his so that you can have the power and ability to seek first his kingdom even as you live in this world. Even as you live with the temptation to be so filled with anxiety and worry that you find yourself seeking first something altogether different.

God has united you to his promise, the very promise made to Abraham in the Old Testament lesson. Now in faith we cling to that promise of God and his kingdom. We join with Abraham, the writer of Hebrews, and all the other heroes of faith in that eleventh chapter of Hebrews that we heard in our epistle lesson. In faith we greet from afar the promise of life eternal with God in the new heavens and the new earth. In Christ and through the continual hearing of the Gospel and participation of the Sacraments we wait in the tension of having received the down payment of our inheritance in the kingdom of God and that day that has not yet come when we shall greet in person the king and participate fully and completely in the joy of his kingdom. By living in a faith like this through the faithfulness of our Heavenly Father we make it clear that we too, like those heroes heard about in Hebrews, are seeking a different homeland. Amen.

In this particular sermon the malady to be addressed is the tendency to be anxious and worry about the things of the world. In this way we seek after those things. We need to be reminded that the same Heavenly Father who clothes the lilies and feeds the birds is our Lord who cares for and provides for our needs—we who are created in the image of God.

In our text Jesus speaks to the disciples about worrying and being anxious. This text is part of a whole section in which Jesus addresses the tendency to be overcome by the treasures of this world in such a way that they replace what is and should be first and foremost—the kingdom of God and the treasures of God in Christ.

This sermon employs a paradox maintained sermon structure. The hearers are continually “seeking the kingdom of God first” while at the same time they are struggling with the temptations and desires to “seek the things of the world” and be consumed by those desires.

The Gospel is the phrase, “Sell all your possessions and give to the needy.” God sold his treasured possession, his firstborn Son, because he counted us of great worth. He wanted to give us the kingdom. So he gave over the king. We were in need of pardon and forgiveness in order to be included in the kingdom. And so our God “sought first the kingdom” for us.

- Rescue Rangers Cartoon of struggle of Monty to devote to mission and chase cheese
 - Always focused on the mission/dedicated to his fellow rangers
 - Seeks even the cheese of others
 - **Absorbed and immersed in seeking cheese/material things**
 - Jesus’ question: “Seeking after food and clothing or the Kingdom of God?”
- We are already seeking the Kingdom of God first and foremost and delighting in the treasures of heaven
 - Receiving God’s gifts of salvation
 - See Church as a priority
 - Engaged in daily prayer life
 - Engaged in Bible Study
- We are constantly becoming anxious and seeking food and clothing first and foremost
 - Give examples
- Paradox Maintained in Christ
 - The Gospel is the phrase, “Sell all your possessions and give to the needy.” God sold his treasured possession, his firstborn Son, because he counted us of great worth. He wanted to give us the kingdom. So he gave over the king. We were in need of pardon and forgiveness in order to be included in the kingdom. And so our God “sought first the kingdom” for us.
 - Active Obedience—He resisted the temptation to seek food and clothing first and foremost
 - Overcame temptation of Satan in the wilderness
 - Prayed the Gethsemane prayer—Your will be done
 - Gave us the prayer—Give us this day our daily bread
 - Passive Obedience—Purchased and won forgiveness
 - Your anxious seeking that leads you to doubt your God and his provision is nailed to the cross, crucified with Christ, forgiven and forgotten
 - Personal Justification—You are baptized into Christ

- You have been transferred to the kingdom of God
- Christ is your King
- Daily living in Christ

Sermon title: “On Worrying”

- How can I picture worry with a story or an image, etc.?
- Horizontal and Vertical Realm—Daily Bread Needs and Lord’s Prayer Didactic Sermon
 - God meets “daily bread” needs of life/*psuche*—eat, drink, “put on”/clothing—**horizontal realm**
 - God meets spiritual “daily bread” needs in Christ—daily bread, living water, clothed in righteousness of Christ in baptism—**vertical realm**
- **Worry**
 - Illogical—doesn’t accomplish anything—doesn’t empty tomorrow of its sorrow—it does empty today of its beauty and strength
 - Feeds upon false security—deceptive view of life and of God—poison
 - Attributes more importance to temporal things than is justified
 - The antidote is trust in God who continues to plan and provide for all he has created and redeemed. He feeds the ravens and he will definitely feed you with daily bread and the bread of life—meeting vertical and horizontal relationships.

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