

July 30, 2017

THE GIVING GOD

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Matthew 6.25-33

Do you remember a song was very popular some time ago - Don't worry, be happy?
In a sense, that song said what Jesus said in the Gospel lesson we just heard.
But Jesus' words have something the song did not have; they give a reason for not worrying.
They point to our loving heavenly Father, who gives and gives and gives,
and tell us to trust in him rather than worry.
And that's what I want to focus on this morning.
I want to call our attention to the fantastic generosity of our heavenly Father.

First, however, a few comments about this passage.
The language of this passage is poetic, not prosaic.

It abounds in hyperbole.

If we take these words with prosaic literalness, they are patently untrue.
It is not true that God always provides for the birds; sometimes they starve.
It is not true that the lilies of the field, or any wild flowers, are always clothed in beauty;
sometimes they are seared by drought.
It is not true that God always supplies the needs of his people;
sometimes Christians starve to death or have inadequate clothing, shelter or clean water..
Taken literally, these words of Jesus are nonsense.
But understood as poetry, they present a wonderful lesson
in a way that has caught the attention of people through the centuries.

With that caveat in mind, let's look at what this passage tells us about the generosity of God.
It focuses our attention on the marvels of creation.
It invites us to gaze upon the glories of God's creation
and marvel at the way that all forms of life are provided for.
Consider the birds of the air.
They spend most of their time seeking food.

Many species have to eat almost constantly because their metabolism is so high.

As Jesus says, they have no harvest time, no barns for storage.
They live day by day, minute by minute.
In strange and wonderful ways the Creator provides for the needs of the birds.

Consider the lilies of the field, the wildflowers.
How beautiful they are.

When I consider the lilies of the field,

I think of the calypso, a tiny orchid that grows in the forests of the sub-alpine Rockies.

It is an exquisite flower, with its yellow, purple and pink blossoms, sitting on a bed of moss.
But it is a flower that is only seen by those who walk in the woods,
and to find one or more calypsos is a thrill that makes any such walk very special.
And then I think of the thousands upon thousands of calypsos that flower and die,
never seen by human eyes and never thrilling human hearts,
and I am reminded again of the bountifulness of God's world.

Consider the birds and the flowers, and then ask yourself that question Jesus asks,

"Are you not of more value than they?"

And the answer is obvious, of course we are.

We are the creatures that God made in his own image.

We are thoroughly enmeshed in the animal world, no doubt about that.

But at the same time we are unique creatures,

creatures who are the special objects of God's love,

who are able to receive and appreciate that love,

and are able to reflect that divine love in our lives.

And it is that love-related, or spiritual side of our being that makes us unique and so very valuable.

We are creatures who seek meaning in life.

We are creatures who can trust and can live in hope.

But above all, we are creatures for whom love is central to our lives.

We are of far more value than the birds and the flowers,

yes, than all the other creatures in our world,

however wonderful and valuable they may be.

That value which we have in God's sight leads to two conclusions, Jesus tells us.

First, we can trust God to supply our needs.

To be sure, God supplies human needs in a very unequal fashion.

To some he gives very much, to others he gives very little.

So has it always been.

Why it should be that way I do not know.

But this I know: whether we receive little or much,

our lives are in God's hands and we should trust God for the supply of our needs.,

That does not mean that we are not supposed to work for our living. Of course we are.

As someone has pointed out, God feeds the birds, but he doesn't drop the food in their nests.

And God provides for our needs, but not apart from our efforts.

While God is able to provide for us in miraculous ways, that is not the ordinary way in which God works. The point is this:

when we are able to work we are to trust God to provide for our needs through our work,

and when we are unable to work we are to trust God to supply our needs in other

ways. The important point is that we are to see everything that we receive as coming from God,

whether or not we have worked for it.

In the final analysis, everything that we have is a gift from God.

The second conclusion is that we are to put the emphasis in our lives on that which makes us unique, on our loving relationship with God.

"Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness." says Jesus.

What does that mean?

It means focussing our attention on our relationship to God above and beyond everything else.

It's sort of like being married.

A married person who makes his or her career the primary focus of life

is not likely to have a good marriage, right?

The meaning of marriage is that our spouse is to be central in our lives, after God.
Everything else has to be somewhere down the line of priorities
if we want our marriage to be solid and stable and rewarding.
And so, when we think about our human needs - food and drink and clothing -
we are called to put them in second place and put God in first place.

And both of those conclusions rest upon the incredible generosity of our God
who gives and gives and gives...and then starts all over giving again!
And God gives like that simply because his very nature is love.
God loves us!
We simply cannot say that too often.
God loves us eternally and passionately.
And because God loves us God delights in giving good gifts to us.
I have seen many examples of God's generosity,
in my life and in the lives of others.
We should never underestimate the incredible generosity of God!

That's why all of this leads up to Jesus' words, "Don't worry!"
Why should we worry, when our lives are in the hands of the God
who loves us dearly and delights in supplying all our needs
according to the riches of his glory in Jesus Christ?
"Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?" Of course.
So Jesus tells us to keep our eyes on the things that are really important,
on our relationship to God and
on the ways we can reflect God's love in our lives.
Put God first in your life and watch everything else fall into place.
And when we are trusting God and walking in the light of God's love for us,
we won't have to worry.
Everything's under control!
Oh, it may not seem so at the moment in your life.
You may be facing deep and difficult problems.
You may be hurting something awful.
Well, I'm not telling you that everything's all right. It really isn't.
But still, everything's under control.
God still loves you and
God has still promised to take care of you and
God still keeps his promises faithfully.

And that also applies to us as a congregation.
God loves St. Andrews.
God will provide for St. Andrews.
God will lead us forward into new and exciting programmes
that will advance the cause of Christ.
God will do all these things, and God will do them through **you and me**.
For that's the way God works, isn't it?

God works through us.

God provides through our giving.

But remember this!

You can never out-give God, not in a million years!

To God, the giver of every good and perfect gift, be all praise and honour and glory, now and forever. Amen.