

## "Setting Priorities" Matthew 6:24-34 Trinity 15 2021

The grace, mercy, and peace of Christ Jesus rest upon each and every one of you this day.

To say we live in anxious times would be a gross understatement. Although we all know that there is certainly nothing new under the sun, we also can't help but look around at the events and conditions we face daily and feel anxiety like we've never known before. For example, we, in the midst of a pandemic, have a federal election coming. Along with this political circus comes all the associated anxiety-producing issues and related rhetoric. No matter what party you support, we're all greatly concerned and very anxious about the economy and jobs and healthcare and social security and the price of gas and the price of housing, just to name a few things that give people ulcers and restless nights and gray hair.

Although...it's also very sad, but as anxious and concerned as we claim to be about all these various issues, we often show that we're more worried about the kids' ball game or the weekend trip to the lake or what so-and-so did last night on whatever reality TV show we're enamored with. We're often more anxious over who liked our post on Facebook. "Does this shirt go with my shoes? Can't we just order a pizza? These are the things that get top billing in our lives. These are the things that make us truly anxious. We live in one of the greatest countries in the world, so we don't have to worry about many of the things that other people in the world have to worry about, such as genocide, famine, or dying from a common cold.

So, what are you anxious about? What gives you gray hair? What keeps you up at night? I know some of you will say "nothing," but that's simply not true. Everyone has anxieties and worries to one degree or another. Maybe the things that make you anxious don't cause you sleep deprivation, but if you wear the flesh of Adam and Eve,

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then you have things that make you anxious. Some anxieties are over big things, like being anxious and worried over family, health, wealth, and well-being, and some anxieties are over small things, like the Wi-Fi connection being down or there being no leftovers in the fridge.

Churches get anxious too. Churches get very anxious when there aren't as many people in the pews. Churches get very anxious and worried when the giving takes a dip, but the bills don't stop coming. And that's being anxious over big things. Never mind the fact that many a congregation suffers division and strife over insignificant things like carpet color or weeds in the flower bed. "Woe is us! The fans can't cool us down in here, and it got slightly uncomfortable. Why has God allowed such a cross to be put upon us?!" We may profess "trust in God above all things," but we often wind up showing where our trust really lies. We often show that, in spite of what we confess, we sometimes fail to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

And that's really what this is all about—priorities—seeking first the kingdom of God; that is, the reign and rule of God; seeking first His righteousness; His justification. I say this because all too often this text is turned into something it was never intended to be: a command to drop the reins on life and not ever worry about anything except Jesus. "If you are anxious about ANYTHING in life, then it shows that you don't have faith in Jesus." Many a person is terrorized by such false teaching. Many a person is beat down into hellish despair because the more they try to not have worries, the more they worry. The more they worry, the more it shows that they don't have faith in Jesus.

Folks: This simply isn't true. Being anxious and worrying about things isn't necessarily sinful, at least not in and of itself. Now, it can become sinful when that worry gives way to doubt and unbelief, or when that worry displaces God by becoming your god. Case in point: Even Christ was anxious. Just look to the Garden of Gethsemane mere

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hours before His arrest and barbaric, torturous death. "My soul is very sorrowful, even unto death. Stay awake and stay here and watch with Me." Being fully God, Jesus knew full-well what awaited Him. He knew full-well the action-plan of salvation and atonement. Jesus tells His disciples about His sorrowful anxiety, and then He goes a short distance away to be in private with His heavenly Father, where He then proceeds to pour out His anxieties, worries, and struggles upon His Father. "Father, if it be possible, take this cup of suffering from Me. But...not My will be done, but Your will be done."

Did you catch all that? Jesus was anxious and worried and concerned, and rightly so. In just a few short hours He was about to suffer for all the sins of all mankind for all time. He was about to be utterly forsaken by His Father, which is something that no one on this side of eternity has ever known. I don't care how bad life seems to be, God is always there for you and has never stopped loving you or caring for you. As long as you have air in your lungs, you are never forsaken or ignored or forgotten by God. Jesus was anxious and worried, BUT... Jesus' anxieties and worries never took precedent or got in the way or superseded His Father's will. God's reign, rule, and righteousness came first. Jesus sought these first, lowering Himself and humbly subjugating Himself to His Father's will.

Now, with all this in mind, I will ask you again: What are you anxious over? When you get down to it, our anxieties can all be traced back to some very root necessities; i.e., food, shelter, clothing, protection, and well-being. It's just human nature. At the root of it all, these are the things that make all of us anxious to one degree or another.

So...perhaps a better question, then, is: What priority do your anxieties have in your life? If you're honest, you will confess that the

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basic things you are so anxious about do often wind up taking center stage in life. We wind up serving the gods of our anxieties rather than the one true God. You trust...so long as things are going well and there is adequate supply and nothing to worry about.

We are so blessed, because God does better – he bridges the gap that our pitiful trust cannot cover. God Himself loved us so much that sent that Gospel promise in the very flesh of man in order to redeem us. Just look at the cross! Here is God's answer to all your anxieties and worries and cares and concerns! Here is God's payment for sin, in full. Here is God's just punishment against all sin for all time, put upon Jesus Christ alone because only He alone, as the perfect Lamb of God, could make proper payment for the wage of sin. It is finished, once and for all; for all people and for all time. The cup of suffering and wrath had been consumed in full, all the bitter dregs and lees included. No more anxieties. No more fear. It is finished. All that remained was a peace that surpasses all human understanding; a peace that is known only in Christ Jesus.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: This is our reality right now! By virtue of your baptism into Christ—into His victorious death and His resurrection—you are fully and completely redeemed. Kind of puts everything else that makes us anxious in proper perspective, doesn't it? No one is telling you to drop the reins on life and not be good stewards of all that God has entrusted to you. All God says is keep it in proper order. Seek first His reign, rule, and righteousness. This is God's super-abundant Gospel gift to you—His Word and His holy, life-giving sacraments. No matter how bad things may get in life, you belong to Him. Whether you live or die, you are resurrected and alive in Christ...and the best is yet to come!

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You know...all this talk of God's Gospel goodness and providence and grace makes me very anxious...anxious in a good way. I'm anxious to get home to heaven. I'm anxious to get to Holy Communion. I want this gift; this peace; this blessed assurance! How about you? Let's call it a day, and let us seek the first and most important things—God and His righteousness—seeking and finding right where He tells us to look; right where He Himself is holding out these gifts of life, love, and peace to all who will receive.

In His most holy and life-giving name...AMEN