

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

²⁴ No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. ²⁵ "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. ³⁴ "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

I don't know if you've heard of this trend, but there are businesses popping up for folks to release their anger and anxiety legally, without hurting anyone. In an old sit-com, the Mary Tyler Moore show, I can remember Lou Grant, when he was really steamed, saying that he was going bowling, because he would see his nemesis' face on every pin when he threw the ball down the alley. He said it

was a way to burn off his anger “legally”! However, it didn’t work out as planned – he broke his bowling ball in the process! When we were in Kansas City a few months ago, our hotel was next to a place where you could pay money to throw axes and hatchets at a target. Knowing my dexterity with tools and such, I’m sure that there would be some pain involved if I were to go to such a place – probably with the axe embedded in my foot!

On the news last night, Des Moines is the newest to have the most exhibitionist example of this type of place – it’s called the Smash Room. Accompanied by food and drink, guests can “vent their frustrations by turning plates, lamps, TVs, windshields, and even appliances like a washer and dryer into shattered glass and misshapen metal.” In the words of the proprietors, “Smash Room is a place people can go and kind of relieve some stress, tension, whatever’s going on in their life,” said owner Chad Lambert. “I had some of my staff do it yesterday, and they smashed a TV, and the smiles on their faces just went ear-to-ear.” Apparently these “Rage Rooms” are on the grow around the country. We’re living in a time where people are very up-tight, stressed out and anxious. They’re willing to part with \$40 or so to spend 20 minutes just destroying things. We feel like our lives are out of control; we’re looking for ways to make it predictable once again, and we’re wanting to take out our anger on inanimate objects. I know that years ago, I was able to destroy my first laptop computer with a 22-pistol, out at my friend’s place out in the country. It was vaguely satisfying, to watch the screen break in two, and the keys on the keyboard be popped off, one by one. But, not everyone has a friend that lives out in the boonies, where it’s safe to do this – that’s where the Smash Room comes in.

However, this is not necessarily the best way for us to deal with the worry, uncertainty and anxiety of the world in which we live. Jesus chides us in this text that we worry too much – I guess I would agree, since those who know me say that I’m a “professional worrier”. I come by it naturally, I guess – my mother was the worrier-in-chief for our family. She was constantly writing lists and plans upon contingency plans, for when things invariably wouldn’t go according to plan. We’re told elsewhere

in Scripture that worry and anxiety are the opposite of faith; part of making us into the image that He wants us to have is to diminish this over-active concern and fear. Rather than trusting in our own resources to provide for us, and making them into a false god for us, we are urged by Jesus to trust in our heavenly Father, because He loves us and wants to provide for us. He commands us and also tenderly invites us to pray to Him for everything that we need. Just like we go to our earthly fathers when we need something, and if it's in his power to provide it, he will; so when we ask our heavenly Father, He's only limited by His understanding of what is best for us. He delights in giving us what we need, and then giving us more out of His abundant love and mercy. Let's take a look at this text in a little bit more detail, and gain some examples of how God wants us to respond to uncertainty and events that are out of our control in this world, prior to His taking us home to be with Him in heavenly glory.

Jesus starts off with the most egregious example: you cannot serve both God and money. Even though we try, money, power, possessions are great temptations for us. We think that we can purchase anything that we want, desire or need. Sometimes this is true, at least for things of this world, and that's what's really dangerous, from a spiritual standpoint. But, the time comes when we run out of money, or don't have the things that we want, and then we become bitter, don't we? Either we resent our employers for not paying us enough, or we resent our family for spending too much money on what we consider "frivolous" expenses. Or, we blame God for allowing trouble to beset us in this life, that we have so many expenses that we didn't plan for

Often, we translate this from the physical sphere into the spiritual one – we think that as long as we're rich and famous and well-off, that God is somehow using this to "reward" us. He blesses us abundantly, to be sure – He wants to be lavish toward us. But, this is NOT a sign of His favor – He causes rain to fall on the righteous and the unrighteous alike – the flood waters afflict both rich and poor, as does the drought. What gets us in trouble, though, is when we think that our money and power are

more important than God, and we start pursuing them more fervently than we do the things of God. This can be seen with our priorities of time – that which we care about the most should be that which we pursue the most. However, the world and our sinful nature try to get us to seek after the things of this world more than the things of the world to come, and we get into trouble in a big hurry

This isn't to say that we shouldn't work to provide for the needs of our families and dependents – don't misunderstand what I'm saying. But, when "chasing the almighty dollar" becomes our greatest preoccupation in life, we need to re-analyze our priorities in life. This is not just spending time in church, which is important, to be sure. It's also the time that we spend outside of the Divine Service and Bible Study, helping out with the various needs of the church, spreading the Word of God to those within our sphere of influence. Often we're prevented from speaking of the most important thing in the universe because we think that if we talk about spiritual things, we will somehow be punished in the workplace. The office is where we get the closest to people, outside of the home and the church, after all. We should be bold, as well as tactful, to choose opportunities where we've built relationships of trust with others. But, we shouldn't let fear completely impair and silence us.

We are to love our possessions, our power, our money, our "nest egg" – less than we love God. Elsewhere in Scripture, this is described as "hating" our father, mother, children, spouse, etc. It's not that we despise them, but that we "love them less" than we love God. This is a difficult balance to achieve, one which only will happen perfectly when we are heavenly glory. But, just because we know it's impossible this side of heaven, that doesn't mean that we just give up. Rather, we first pray for forgiveness, confessing our sins and realizing that we have fallen short of God's perfection. ALL OF US have done this – no one is excepted. We then pray for the strength of the Holy Spirit to live differently, for there to be a change in our heart, and for us to realize that a different attitude is necessary for us to be followers of Christ. All the while, we give thanks and praise to God that He is the one that changes us, and molds us, and shapes us into the image that He wants us to have. This passage is clear – we

cannot serve two masters – we don't want to hate, or love less, God than money. So, we pray for the courage and strength to become more and more like the image that God wants us to have, every day.

Along the way, this change in focus will give us much less pent-up anger, stress and anxiety. I don't think it's a coincidence that having "Smash Rooms" coincides with a great decrease in expressed faith in our society. The young, especially, are falling away from the church in droves – just take a look at the data, both from our own LCMS and Barna Research – nearly 50% of those under 30 don't regularly attend worship services, and 70% of those who are confirmed in the church will fall away by the time they finish college. There are many reasons for this, including the anti-Christian atmosphere that most of our institutions of higher learning instill in our young people, and a general anti-Christian sentiment in our society today – we think we know better than to trust in God; we can just make our own way in life, independent of any governing authority, or so we think...

But, as the society becomes much less tethered to the church, and to the preaching and teaching that goes on here, people are flailing, grasping at straws, searching for something that will deliver permanence into their lives. The thing that most of us fear the most: being out of control, not knowing what's next. Those young folks that have stayed in the church, what's the number one thing that they say appeals to them? The liturgy – that's been around for centuries, that doesn't change, as everything else in their lives is in flux around them. It's very difficult for someone to come back to the church after being away from it for a long time. And, since we're delaying major life events further and further into the future, such as marriage, children, etc., it shouldn't come as a surprise that for many young people, they've been away from the church for 10-15 years before these traditional events that would cause one to come back to the church occur.

Jesus gives examples of the birds of the air, and the lilies of the field, that don't worry about their next meal, or where to get the materials to weave and spin more. This simplicity reflects a return to the perfection of the Garden of Eden, where God created everything to live in symbiosis. This

passage is full of references to Genesis-like language – talking about the birds of the heavens and the lilies of the field – these were all created before man, and were created to be subject to man. Man, on the other hand, was and is the crown of God’s creation – we are the closest creation to the image of God that there is – we were given dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and the plants of the field.

If the lower things are taken care of by God, and provided with everything that they need to not only survive, but thrive, then we shouldn’t be concerned that He will provide for us. He eagerly desires to give us what we need, and then some. The only reason that He would decide to withhold something from us is because He knows, in His all-knowing foresight, that it would be detrimental to us.

Sometimes, it would serve to alienate us further from God if He blessed us with even more riches than we already have. God knows what blessings will do to us, even before we receive them. Rather than being quick to blame God when things don’t go our way, we ought to be thankful that He protects us from temptation, as well as from need and lack. Remember Joseph – he was given the knowledge to understand that all of his sufferings, and living in slavery, and being away from everyone he knew, was for the greater good of his going ahead of his brothers into Egypt, to provide for them in the upcoming famine. That’s trust, folks!

“Seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” This is a fitting sum-up to this text of Scripture. It doesn’t say that we shouldn’t be concerned at all about the things of this world, providing for our families in our vocations in life. It doesn’t say that we should be bumps on a log, wait for the kingdom of heaven to be revealed, and be of so much heavenly good that we aren’t worth anything on earth. We continue to serve God as we wait with eager expectation for the Last Day, which will come in His perfect time. However, we seek first the things of God and His righteousness. The most important gift that God has given us is making things right between us and the Father – our sin has been taken away from us. No matter whether we are rich or

poor, we are all fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus. That is something that this world cannot take away from us, no matter how much suffering and embarrassment and persecution we might endure.

As we live in these grey and latter days, we need to be prepared for things to get pretty rough. Jesus prophesies, and John backs up, that the Last Days will be very difficult. It's only for the sake of the elect, after all, that they are cut short – otherwise, no one would survive and remain faithful. We can expect that the faith of many will grow cold; we will be hated for the Name of Christ which we bear. If we trust in earthly riches to get us through, to “buy us influence” with the earthly authorities, we are sadly mistaken – it will NOT work! However, if we trust in the Lord with all of our heart, mind, and strength, He will see us through. He is stronger than any resistance that this sinful world can throw at Him. He has already won the victory on the cross of Calvary; the devil can kick and scream, he can make things miserable for us in this life, but he does not control the soul. Jesus' death and resurrection assures us of that – in the same way that He was crucified and died and was raised again, so we will be raised to eternal life. In the same way that He ascended into heaven bodily, so shall we on the Last Day. He has truly done everything for our salvation – He has overcome our sinful desires, our lack of faith and devotion to Him, our clinging to the things of this world because they are what we know and are familiar with. Thanks be to God that He crucifies our sinful flesh every day, and makes us more and more into the image that He wants us to have, until He perfects us and takes us with Him to heavenly glory. He enables us to more highly esteem the things of the world to come, which are imperishable, rather than the things of this world, which moth and rust destroy, and thieves break in and steal. Amen.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Amen.