

“Don’t Be Anxious?”

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Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Happy Thanksgiving! Do you have any anxieties running through your mind right now? Of course not right?? It’s only Thanksgiving, the beginning of the race to the end of the year. I’m sure you have plenty to be anxious about on a day like today. Maybe you’re trying to think if you’ve forgotten anything for the big meal in a few hours or maybe you’re worried about everyone getting along at the house this year. Or maybe you’re worried about the big one, whether or not your football team will pull off a win around 1 o’clock.

There is plenty to make us anxious on a day like today. Plenty to pull us away from the thankfulness that we are supposed to feel on this day of Thanksgiving and then we hear Jesus’ message in Matthew’s gospel. “Do not be anxious about your life...” Really Jesus? Don’t be anxious, don’t be worried? Why this text on today of all days? I’d love to not be worried, but it’s not like there’s an off switch to my worry. Why give a command like this on a day like today?

But what if this wasn’t just a command? What if Jesus gave us these words as a *comforting* command? Emphasis on the comfort. Jesus lived on this earth and walked around with people just like you and me. Even back then people had to plan for big holidays with dysfunctional families and large meals. He knows how hard it can be for sinful people like us to just put off our anxieties. So Jesus tells us in a loving voice, “don’t be anxious” instead of the stern commanding tone of an annoyed parent.

In our world today, especially on a day like today, we could all use a word of comfort from our loving Savior about the worries and anxieties in our lives, because this world we live in is full of worry. Everywhere we look we are told to worry about food, clothing, or other material possessions and as sinful human beings it is easy for us to fall into these worries. We are told that if only we had those pair of shoes or that fishing pole, then we would be happy, then our worries would all be gone.

We may know that’s not true, but it is easy to fall into that mentality. Even if we don’t go out to fulfill those wants, our minds are full of anxieties that are only added to by the messages in our society. “Buy this, that, or the other thing and then you’ll feel better.” The devil knows what can drive us into anxiety and he’s very good at laying the traps in front of us. Especially the trap of saying that we cannot get out of our anxieties and worries. Telling us that there’s nothing we can do but fall into the temptations he has set before us.

Then this message comes from Jesus. Our Savior knows that there is nothing we can do to dig ourselves out of our anxieties, so He points us to what has already been done for us. He points us back to the basics, to the One who has promised to always care for us. Jesus draws our eyes away from the temptations of this world and puts our focus back on the heavenly Father and what He has done for us.

In His short message, Jesus uses two illustrations to show us how much our Father loves and cares for us. Jesus knows that it's hard for us to simply accept His message as comforting, so He goes on to show us that our heavenly Father truly does care for and love us and how it is that He is still working in our lives.

The first illustration that Jesus uses is in verse 26 of our text. Let's read that together: "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?"

In a very literal way the birds of the air are completely reliant on the Father. Sure, you may have a bird feeder in your back yard, but the Father has even created the bird seed in the feeder. Birds don't spend hours and hours planning for meals, grocery shopping, or cooking, yet our heavenly Father feeds them. They are completely reliant on their Creator. They depend on the Creator to grow the trees where the birds build their nests and grow the plants where they get their food. They trust that the Creator will continue to give them what they need throughout every day. And if God will provide for the birds of the air, He will certainly provide for us as well.

We too are reliant on our Creator, but to us He is more than the Creator; He is also our Father. Jesus uses this beautiful imagery, reminding us of who this great, awesome, and mighty God is to us. He is the one who has created all things since the beginning of time. In the beginning He created all things and since then has never stopped caring for His beloved creation. This Creator is also our Father.

Jesus makes a point here to call our God, our Father. This reminds us of the relationship that we have with the God of heaven. He is not some god that sits atop his throne, looking down on us little people on earth, not caring how life turns out for us. Our God is also our Father. This is an intimate relationship that we have been brought into by the waters of baptism. Jesus invites us to rely on our heavenly Father. Just as the birds of the air rest in the branches the Creator grows for them, we are invited to rest in the arms that our Creator Father holds out to us.

Jesus continues His message with a second illustration. Read with me verses 28-30: "And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 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?"

Again, Jesus gives us some great imagery of our Creator working in a garden, growing the lilies of the field by His own hand. Maybe some of you have gardens at home and can relate to the care it takes to grow a garden.

Both of my parents love to garden. My mom has flower gardens surrounding every inch of the house and all the way up and down the drive way. My dad works the vegetable garden, growing every possible vegetable that he can. To any visitor, these gardens look beautiful and plentiful, which they certainly are, but what they don't see is all the work that had to go into those gardens. They don't see weekend after weekend of my mom sweating as she crawls around the flower gardens, meticulously picking every little weed. They don't see my dad walking barefoot behind a stubborn tiller every spring in his torn up shorts and cut off shirt, both of which should have been thrown away years ago.

All summer long my parents labor over their gardens. It's not always pretty, but they put in the work. They do what they need to in order to make sure that their gardens grow because in a way, they love their gardens. They give their gardens everything they need to grow.

Plants don't do anything to grow themselves. Only the great Creator can really cause the lilies of the field to grow. No matter how much work my parents put into their gardens, they know it is our Father that really provides for the plants. But it is a good reminder of how our Father works in our lives too. He continually provides for us, just as my parents work in their gardens all summer, feeding and nourishing the plants, our Father continues to provide for us all throughout our lives.

He provides for us in the ways that He knows we need. Our Father knows all of our needs and He knows that our greatest need is our need for a Savior. He knows that by ourselves we will continually run toward our anxieties and worries, trying to fix everything ourselves only to fall deeper into despair. He knows that, like the lilies of the field, we cannot provide for ourselves what we need to live. We can only truly live through the saving grace given to us freely through our Savior, Jesus Christ.

So God our Father sent His Son to this earth to do the dirty work. Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead so that we might live for eternity with our Father in heaven. Our Father sacrificed His only Son out of His love for us. His only Son was willing to die because He knew that only through Him would we be able to have a relationship with the Father.

Because of this love, Jesus confidently gives us this comfort, "don't be anxious." You already have everything you need. You have a Father who cares deeply for you. A Father who has forgiven you and loves you and promises to provide for you all you need. And this Father always keeps His promises.

We can still slip into anxiety and worry, there's no denying that. But when we do, we can look to our Savior who hung on a cross for us and who points our focus back to the Father who is our comfort. The Father who stands with arms wide open, waiting for His children to come running to Him. And just as the birds of the air and the lilies of the field trust their Creator to provide for them, we find comfort on this day of thanksgiving in knowing that we have no need to be anxious, for we have a Father who always provides.