

This season the theme at St. John's is, "Soulful Songs of Summer." As I reflect on our Gospel, the words from the fifth verse of "With the Lord Begin Your Task" come to mind: **"Thus, Lord Jesus, ev'ry task Be to You commended; May Your will be done, I ask, Until life is ended. Jesus, in Your name begun Be the day's endeavor; Grant that it may well be done To Your praise forever."**

Devotion to God alone: This is our calling.

OPENING PRAYER

MATTHEW 6:26-34

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.

Earlier, we heard the words of Jesus. He said we should rely on God for everything we need in this life, for **"your heavenly Father knows that you need them all."**

Those are encouraging words, words of assurance and love. But how hard it is to put those words to work in my own life! Consider the two verses preceding the Gospel. Jesus said,

Matthew 6:24-25

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 mammon. 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?

Jesus first shared this message at his Sermon on the Mount. The people there were laborers, slaves, fishermen, and middle management. So when he said, **“No one can serve two masters,”** they immediately thought to themselves, “There’s nothing worse than having two bosses! They split you in half, and you can’t get your work done right, and no one’s happy!”

Again, Jesus said, **“No one can serve two masters,”** and then he said, **“You cannot serve God and mammon.”** **“Mammon”** is **“wealth,”** as in, **“You cannot serve God and wealth.”** Jesus wanted the people to understand that these two things are mutually exclusive, for they both demand undivided loyalties.

Consider the job descriptions of God and wealth, personifying wealth for just a moment. Just as we would evaluate a job description before accepting any other job offer, we should evaluate these job descriptions, our spiritual job offers. First, concerning our work under God.

I divide this work into three categories: Worship, Work, and Family, as we learn in Genesis 1 and 2. Luther said that if we follow the Lord’s command to love our neighbor, we’ll be the perfect worker and family member. Everything else follows. Respect and loyalty follow love. Obedience and service follow love.

In **Matthew 26**, Jesus said, **“As you have done to the least of these My brethren, so too you have done unto Me.”** When we love one another, when we love our neighbor, when we love even our enemies, we serve the Lord. That’s how we answer God’s call on our lives in our WORK and FAMILIES: to love.

Jesus said the two greatest commandments were to love God and to love neighbor, that **“On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:40).**

Which brings us to the WORSHIP part of our vocation under God. In WORSHIP, first, God serves us: He serves us with the absolution of sins; He serves us with the assurance of salvation with the proclamation of Christ's death and resurrection; He serves us with his body and blood on the altar for the forgiveness of sins; and he blesses us.

And in worship we serve God in response to what he's done for us when we lift up our prayers to him with confidence; when we sing to him songs of adoration and thanksgiving; when we give our tithes and offerings for his mission in our community; and when we say thank you.

This is a pretty good deal. It's like a new employer giving you a 4-week paid vacation in the Bahamas before you even begin your job! And when you return from your vacation all you have to do is say, "Thank you"! That's WORSHIP in a nutshell.

So that's what it looks like to serve God. But there's the other master: WEALTH. What's he like as a boss?

Five times in the Gospel Jesus used the word "anxious" to describe the state of the person who's master is money. He said, **"do not be ANXIOUS, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or '...drink?' or wear?'"** And **"do not be ANXIOUS about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be ANXIOUS for itself."**

That's what it's all about, isn't it. Anxiety and worry. According to Jesus, the things of this world shouldn't even be on our radar. The accumulation of stuff is NOT a vocation in itself for the Lord has promised to provide everything we need.

So the choice is obvious: God is the better boss. But how hard it is to remain true to him! For we worry about our stuff. I worry about my stuff. The more stuff I have, the more I worry about it. It's a trap! The pride-trap. The security-trap.

When we worry about our stuff, we place all of our mental, emotional, and spiritual energy into getting it and preserving it, and we neglect our higher calling, our vocation to serve God in our worship, work, and family.

Each one of us could probably give up 50% of what we own and hardly feel it. But we don't like that because we have been indoctrinated to believe that more stuff

and bigger stuff equals a better life. But the truth is that the more we have, the more we have to worry about and the less we trust God.

If money is our master, imagine how our FAMILIES would suffer. The emptiness of the relationships would be overwhelming.

In the CHURCH, if money is our master we would put the maintenance of property before our ministry to people.

St. Paul wrote about a right understanding of WORSHIP. When he said, **Romans 12:1, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual WORSHIP."** We don't offer the church property to God, but we give Him our bodies, our very lives **"as a living sacrifice."** If we do anything less than that, we've confused serving God with serving stuff.

Friends in Christ, it is this Gospel which has relieved me and you from the burden of stuff, possessions, and wealth.

It makes so much more sense to serve God, doesn't it? After all, stuff didn't die for me, and stuff didn't rise from the dead for me. I won't have any stuff in heaven. But I will have Jesus. And so it's Him whom I serve.

Isaiah wrote, **Isaiah 43:18-19, "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!"** This week let us take hold of these words as our own. God is doing a new thing in our lives today.

In a few moments we are going to sing these words: **"Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come, Let this blest assurance control, That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate And hath shed His own blood for my soul. It is well with my soul"** ("It Is Well With My Soul" (v.2)).

May these words linger with you through the week as you reflect on how much the Lord loves you and will care for you unto eternity.

And this week may you have the opportunity to share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.