

In Whom do You Trust?

A sermon by John Strommen on Matt. 6:19-34 Nov. 19, 2017

Back in the late seventies, Bob Dylan reminded us in a song that you “gotta serve somebody.” My wife encouraged me to sing it in a Bob Dylan voice. Is that OK?

*You may be an ambassador to England or France
You may like to gamble, you might like to dance
You may be the heavyweight champion of the world
You may be a socialite with a long string of pearls.*

*You might own guns and you might even own tanks
You might be somebody's landlord you might even own banks.*

*You may be rich or poor, you may be blind or lame
You may be living in another country under another name.*

*But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed
You're gonna have to serve somebody,
It may be the devil or it may be the Lord
But you're gonna have to serve somebody.*

Similarly, Jesus said “No one can serve two masters.” You’re gonna have to choose! Everyone is gonna have to choose.

This is why Luther said that there is no such thing as an atheist, because whatever a person trusts in, ultimately, to give their life meaning, is their god. So everyone believes in a god, one way or another. Whatever gives your life meaning, you will inescapably serve. Your actions will be geared around receiving what you need from that thing that you trust.

What are things that people around you trust in and serve? (hear responses)

Right after the part about serving God or wealth, Jesus says “therefore,” and goes into his *Hakuna Matata* speech, inviting us to not worry about anything. What’s the connection? Simply this: Worrying is a function of trusting in the wrong thing or person. If we trust in money, success or pleasure to make our lives meaningful, we will be anxious a lot, because those things can’t fulfill us. They may only create more anxiety, because they are not trustworthy where it counts most.

What do people today feel anxious and worry about these days? (hear responses).

In addition to making life unpleasant, worrying turns us inward on ourselves in kind of a self-absorbed, narcissistic way, which means we are often not present for our neighbor, or our spouse. John Telgren

tells the story of when his wife was trying to have a conversation with him, and he was preoccupied with something, so he was simply agreeing with everything she said. Isn't this the key to a good marriage, "yes, dear"? Eventually she asked him if she should make a dress from pickles and peanut butter, and he agreed. Telgren learned from this that he needed to stop whatever he is thinking or worrying about and be present with his wife.

I'm sure we can all agree that worrying doesn't accomplish anything. How then can we be free from worrying? How do we take ourselves off of our hands?

The *only* way to be given the gift of not worrying is by trusting in the *only* one who is trustworthy: God. Who promised to take care of us. We're still going to worry, but we don't have to.

"Consider the lilies, how they neither toil nor spin, yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed as one of these!" God's got your back. You're free.

This seems a bit paradoxical, doesn't it? If we are serving a master, we don't think of being free, but that is exactly what happens here. In serving the right master, you're free! "Do not worry about anything" are lovely words that give us a glimpse into grace.

There was a story in the paper a few years ago about a mother of 6 children, who then adopted 12 more. The question was asked of her how she deals with all the stress of 18 children. No word on whether they asked the father how he dealt with the stress. Anyway, her response was interesting: she said, "I do the work, and let God do the worrying, because he cares for me."

I few years ago, I had my own "consider the lilies" experience in the midst of spring cleaning. Actually it was a "consider the larvae" experience. I'll explain. I had lifted up a piece of plywood that had been lying on the ground all winter. Underneath it I discovered an ant colony built on the top of the woodchips, earth and twigs below. And on top of the ant colony were dozens of ant larvae suddenly exposed by my lifting up the plywood. They had been in the moist shade, but now they were in the sunlight, which is not where ant larvae are supposed to be. So, the ants that were above ground sprang into action. They knew exactly what to do. They each headed for different larvae, which were about the same size as they were, picked it up and began moving it to somewhere in the lower catacombs of earth and woodchips – in each case to a precise location that was completely in the shade. I watched and marveled as these ants purposefully and efficiently transported every last larvae to protective shade within five minutes. Not one of the 50 larvae was left behind! These ants were looking after their next generation, and we humans could all take lessons.

If God made these ants with the capacity to care for each other this way, imagine how much more God will see to it that you and I will be cared for.

Luther picked up on this in the Small Catechism. When we confess, *I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, we are saying that I believe that God has created me together with all that exists. God has given me and still preserves my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all limbs and senses, my*

reason and all my mental faculties.

In addition, God daily and abundantly provides shoes and clothing, food and drink, house and farm, spouse and children, fields, livestock, and all property – along with all the necessities and nourishment for this body and life. God protects me against all danger and shields and preserves me from all evil. All this is done out of pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness of mine at all!

In light of all the ways that God provides for us – and this section didn't even include Jesus - Luther says we should thank and praise God. In fact, when we practice gratitude, we are reminding ourselves that God is trustworthy, that God has taken care of me and that God has been faithful to Mt Carmel and will continue to be faithful as we move forward.

As you've participated in the Gratitude Challenge, here are some of the things you put on the tree back there for which you are grateful (read them). Practicing gratitude reminds us that God actually takes care of me, that God has been good to me. That God is trustworthy.

Let's conclude by coming back to "you can't serve two masters; you can't serve God and wealth." Money is God's biggest competitor, maybe. In fact, money is mentioned more often by Jesus than any other topic he addressed. What we do with our money is a deeply spiritual matter.

Today we offered our financial pledges for God's work here at MC. A financial pledge is a way of saying, "I have chosen who I will serve because my trust is in God." Maybe, just maybe, a pledge is a protest of the false gods we trust in. Maybe, a pledge declares that we trust that God will take care of us, that we are called to be free from the burden of our own worry and anxiety. Amen.