

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

24th September 2023 – Thanksgiving Sunday

Matthew 6:25-34

DON'T WORRY, BE THANKFUL

In some cultures, and I can really only speak about Western culture in general and Australian culture in particular, it is customary to have special days which focus on particular people, with the intention that on those days we show how thankful we are in having these people in our lives. We probably straight away think of birthdays, Mother's Day and Father's Day, as times when we make a particular effort to make people in our lives feel special, and let them know how much they mean to us. Another time we tend to do this, and often in a deeper and more thankful way, is at funerals, although of course then the person we want to honour and thank isn't there to hear what is said about them. It's something we do as people too often, isn't it; only really think about and express what someone has meant to us after they are no longer with us. As part of the Address for my uncle's funeral back in April, I said that I'd never stopped to think about how much influence he had on me in my life until he had died, and therefore, sadly, I never got to thank him for that. It's good to think about the reasons we have to be thankful for the people who are in our lives, and to take the time to really share that with them, not just leaving it until it's too late.

Those special days help us to take the time and effort to be thankful for people in our lives, something which hopefully leads us to thanking them at other times also. And we know that we can give thanks to God at any time, and we do; in our worship, in our lives. As we have looked at prayer over these past three weeks we remembered and reflected again on how giving thanks to God plays a big part in how and why we pray. But like the days we have set aside to celebrate special people in our lives, it's also good for us to have a special service of Thanksgiving to particularly focus on all the blessings

God gives us in our lives, what they mean for us, and especially to give thanks to the Giver Himself.

The Gospel reading we have for today, part of what we call Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, is a very well-known reading to most of us. It's so well known that it's easy to just go over it quickly, immediately have come into our minds what we remember it as being about. But a part of giving thanks is taking the time to stop, listen, think, reflect, so let's do that now with this reading – take your time going over it as we hear Jesus' words and reflect on what they mean for our lives: 'I tell you not to worry about your life. Don't worry about having something to eat, drink, or wear. Isn't life more than food or clothing? Look at the birds in the sky! They don't plant or harvest. They don't even store grain in barns. Yet your Father in heaven takes care of them. Aren't you worth much more than birds? Can worry make you live longer? Why worry about clothes? Look how the wild flowers grow. They don't work hard to make their clothes. But I tell you that Solomon with all his wealth wasn't as well clothed as one of them. God gives such beauty to everything that grows in the fields, even though it is here today and thrown into a fire tomorrow. God will surely do even more for you! Why do you have such little faith? Don't worry and ask yourselves, "Will we have anything to eat? Will we have anything to drink? Will we have any clothes to wear?" Only people who don't know God are always worrying about such things. Your Father in heaven knows you need all of these. But more than anything else, put God's work first and do what he wants. Then the other things will be yours as well. Don't worry about tomorrow. It will take care of itself. You have enough to worry about today.' (*Matt. 6:25-34 CEV*)

As you listen to or read those words of Jesus, what does it say to you about being thankful (perhaps share together if someone is with you)?

These words of Jesus are about the attitude we have towards what we are given, but even more than that, the attitude towards Who gives us these things. Jesus uses the

examples of the beauty of the flowers and how God cares for the birds to tell us that we can trust in Him for what we need in our lives. When it comes to giving thanks, we often tend to focus on the gifts. And that's ok, it's good to do that and to be grateful for these things. But even more important than focusing on the gifts is focusing on the Giver. That will change our attitude, which will then change us.

Don't Worry. Be thankful. Both attitudes which involve us appreciating what we have, and recognising the One who gives them to us. But it can be hard, can't it? We live in a very affluent society. It's easy to drive around and see the cars I think I would like to have, or the houses I would like to live in. Advertising is about convincing me that I need the things I didn't even know I wanted, so it's hard not to think I need a bigger TV, a more exotic holiday, more and more and more money. Of course, there is nothing wrong with any of these things, they are gifts of God to enjoy. But be careful about the attitude we have towards them; are they the ultimate source of our joy and peace in life? Or are they a gift from God to enjoy as just one part of everything He has given to us?

And Jesus is also not saying 'don't plan', 'don't work', 'don't save', 'don't set goals and work towards them'. Those things are all part of our vocations in this life, and of being good stewards of what God has given us. To work, plan and save to provide for ourselves and our families, and also to enjoy the other things is what God calls us to do, is a part of living out the lives God has given us.

Don't worry. Be thankful. Because in the end all the things in this world are, well, things. In our second reading for today Paul gives us another well-known reading; 'Rejoice in the Lord always!' (*Phil. 4:4a*) Paul doesn't say that because things were going really well for him at that time, in fact he was in prison because of his faith. So why can Paul keep on rejoicing even in this situation? Because, in his words, he knows that the Lord is near, and he knows that instead of worrying but by bringing everything to God we have God's peace, which is beyond our understanding. Our lives are then no

longer based on what we have or what we can do, but instead filled with the hope and peace God wants to give to us.

So not just today, but each day, take the time to stop and be thankful. Think about and appreciate the people who are in your lives; don't just assume they know what they mean to you, tell them. Take the time also to think about the people, the situations, the things, God has given you in your life; both the food, clothes, housing etc which you need, as well as the many things which you enjoy. And in thinking about that, think especially about the One who has given all of this to you, and most of all about gift of forgiveness and new life He has given you in His Son. In thanking God, we can bring all our worries to Him, trusting Him to care for us as He cares for all of creation. And we can then be thankful for not just what we are given, and most of all for the One who not only gives us all of this, but who also gives us the peace and hope which are the greatest gifts we can ever receive. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- Who are the people you are thankful for in your life? What do you appreciate about them? Do you let them know that? If not, try and take the time to do that this week.
- What are the necessities of life God gives you which you are thankful for? Stop and think about them, especially the ones we normally take for granted.
- What extra joys of life God gives you which you are thankful for? Again, stop and consider them, especially the ones you might take for granted. While God gives us these things to enjoy, do you always put them in their right place, ie, not allow them to come between you and your relationship with God or with other people?
- Do you ever worry about things which you know you can just hand over to God? If so, ask Him to help you to be more focused on trusting Him and handing these things over to Him.
- How does being thankful for all we have, and focusing on the love and generosity of the Giver more than on the gifts, help us to be less worried and anxious in our lives?

Pray: thank God for all He gives us in our lives, both the things we need as well as those we enjoy. Ask God to help us to have an attitude of thankfulness, and to trust in His love and thankfulness for us in all things.

Pastor Andrew R. Koehler
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