

“Who Do We Serve?”

Matthew 6:24-34

If you can imagine yourself sitting in a boat in the middle of the Sea of Galilee and facing north, looking to your right and left you see steep hills and cliffs rising up from the water. But looking straight ahead to the north there is a very gentle and green slope gradually rising from the shore. It is tillable and the most fertile land visible from the boat. It is an ideal gathering spot for people to come and hear an increasingly well-known teacher, healer, and miracle worker. A natural amphitheater with the wind blowing in off the water from behind the teacher and blowing his voice into the ears of those thousands sitting on the hill around him.

This is a tranquil place, a wilderness place, a place of farmers and country folk far to the north of the hustle and bustle of city life in Jerusalem. These people sitting in the field around Jesus with the beautiful Sea of Galilee in the background are a simple people, not wealthy, country folk living one day at a time surrounded by the natural beauty of the Galilee countryside.

They recline on the grass, warmed by sunlight, wildflowers blooming around them, curious to hear the words from this young man who grew up just a few miles to the west, into the hills, in the tiny village called Nazareth. He has prayed with them, ate with them, touched them and is now teaching. He is one of them. He understands who they are, how they live, and what they believe. He is one of them. He is one of us.

He is here with us now, in this building where we have gathered together in his name to listen to his teaching, to listen to his words. Listen on this Thanksgiving Eve.

“No one can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other, or we will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon”.

Sitting in the field, smelling the wildflowers

next to me, the breeze blowing off the water into my face, sunlight warming, God all around, a few coins in my pocket, -- who do I serve? The Creator God I see in the flowers, I feel in the wind and sunlight, the Creator of God that surrounds me with beauty and warmth – or – the hard, man-made coins in my pocket. Who do I serve?

As I sit in God’s house in a wooden pew, books of God’s Word and music in front of me, the hand of God above, darkness outside, light inside, God all around and a few dollars in my billfold – who do I serve? The Creator God I see in my grandchildren’s faces tomorrow, I feel in the music and the sacrament, the Creator God that surrounds me with beauty and warmth – or -- the dirty man-made bills in my billfold? Who do I serve?

The teacher says I cannot serve both. I cannot be devoted to both. I cannot love both. I cannot serve both.

But it seems I need one more than the other. I need to pay the credit card bill, the grocery bill, the electric bill, the T.V. bill, the insurance bill, the doctor bill, the car repair bill, and, if there’s any leftover, as I sit in God’s house in a wooden pew, books of God’s music and Word in front of me, the hand of God above, darkness outside, light inside, God all around and a few dollars in my billfold – Who do I serve? The Creator God I see in my grandchildren’s faces, I feel in the music and the sacrament, the Creator God that surrounds me with beauty and warmth – or – the dirty, man-made bills in my billfold. Who do I serve?

The teacher says I cannot serve both. But it seems I need one more than the other. I need to pay the bills. I need money to pay the bills so I can live the way I need to live. I know I need God, too. But the teacher says, “No one can serve two masters”. Who do I serve? Who do you serve? Is the teacher right?

I kept listening to the teacher. “Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”

Anxious about eating. The teacher sees my daughter prepping meals for the week on Monday, for two young sons and a husband with Crohn’s disease. She has to be particular and choose healthy foods that both of them will help prepare during the week. We will join them in Columbus tomorrow morning where our 3 Columbus children with their families will share with my mother, Danette, and I a thanksgiving meal. We have much to be thankful for. The teacher watches and says, “do not be anxious about what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on”.

Anxious about clothing. Name brands. “Shoes have to have the right name on them”! A wife frustrated with a husband still wearing clothes he wore 30 years ago. We need to get rid of the old to make room for the Christmas presents of clothing. Justifications for new stuff.

Are we anxious about our life? What we eat and what we put on? “Is not life more than food, and the body more that clothing? 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? And which of you be being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life? 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 people of little faith? Therefore, do not be anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or What shall we drink? or What shall we wear”?”

But it seems we need to be anxious about what we shall eat and drink and what we shall wear. And we need the dirty, man-made bills in our billfold to pay the bills for what we eat, drink, and wear.

What if there’s a drought or a flood or a hurricane or a fire that cuts short the lives of the birds and flowers who trust in God? Yes, right now all is well as we sit listening to the teacher with the flowers blooming, the birds singing, and the sun shining down on us. Yes, right now all is well as we sit in God’s house on a wooden pew, interest rates are low, jobs are plentiful, food is in the refrigerator, and vaccines are working.

Can we really live like the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, trusting God will care for us today and tomorrow? Or do we need to continue our frantic pursuit of all-you-can-eat buffets, Samoski’s pizza, holy jeans, the sport utility vehicle, the mortgage, or line of credit; depending on ourselves to survive today and tomorrow? Is there any compromise between living like the birds of the air and lilies of the field and the frantic pursuit of everything we think we need? Is it one lifestyle or the other? Is it somewhere in between?

For the teacher’s listeners sitting in the field, smelling the wildflowers next to me, the breeze blowing off the water into my face, sunlight warming, God all around, a few coins in my pocket, -- who do I serve?

The Creator God I see in the flower, I feel in the wind and the sunlight, the Creator God that surrounds me with beauty and warmth – or – the hard, man-made coins in my pocket. For me, the choice is easy. As for my and my house, we will serve the Lord.

But when you leave the field and go home to the bills, the television, the darkness you will experience when you leave this place – then who will you serve? Who will I serve? Will we be able to live out the confession of faith we made in the field while listening to the teacher? Or will we confess one thing and live another?

On this Thanksgiving, may the peace of God . . .

#693 – Come, Ye Thankful People, Come