

Many years ago, it was the day before Thanksgiving. Back then H-E-B closed at 6:00pm. It was 6:00pm, a man raced from his car and begged an employee who was locking up, "Please let me in. I forgot to buy a turkey, and my wife will throttle me if I don't come home with one."

"Okay," the employee said, "Let me see what I have left." The employee goes to the back and finds one scrawny little turkey left. He brings it out to show the man.

"That one is too skinny. What else you got?" says the man demands.

The employee takes the bird back into the freezer and waits a few minutes. Then he brings the same turkey back out to the man.

"Oh, no," says the man, "That one doesn't look any better. You better give me both of them!"¹

That man had a concern. Yet I don't know if hearing our reading from Matthew's gospel would have made him feel any better!

Let's look a bit at the context. This lesson about worry is part of the greatest sermon ever preached: The Sermon on the Mount. He is indicating that he is coming to the high point of what he is talking about. It is very important. Jesus is saying to any of those who were sleeping in the crowd: I have arrived at my point.

The text right before this is choosing between God and wealth. A famous theologian, John Calvin,² noted that an idol is anything that stands between us and God. It is not coincidental that the words admonishing worry come after a conversation on wealth. It is not that wealth is problematic. It is certainly not that Jesus wants us to default on our mortgages because we do not think about them. Jesus is reminding us that our love for God should be the center of our lives.

The world around Matthew's gospel is also important. Similar to our time, there was great division. In some ways, Matthew's community was a great experiment. Just like America. There were Jews and gentiles. People who before Christ's resurrection never would have sat together. This is why the early Christian Community needed the reminder from Timothy, "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings should be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity."³ Similarly, we are to pray for all in our community. Those who agree with us on politics, and those who don't: we should share a table with all God's people; the alternative is division. Division is where anxiety and depression deepen.

Think about it: if we are divided, we worry about ourselves. If we are united around Christ's love we are thinking of others.

Years ago, a dear friend of mine gave me a counter. I was in a time of sadness. He encouraged me to get up and count my blessings (literally) every day. I would do this after my morning prayer and I became less anxious and more focused on the present. When we recognize that "life is a gift from God, then we begin embodying Christ's light wherever we go."⁴ Counting

¹ Here is the source of the joke and more Thanksgiving jokes
<http://sermonseedbed.com/thanksgiving-jokes-for-preachers-to-use/>

² Ewart, D. (2011). *Holy Textures*.

<https://www.holytextures.com/2011/02/matthew-6-24-34-year-a-epiphany-8-february-25-march-3-2-sermon.html>

³ 1 Timothy 2:1-2

⁴ Long, Thomas. (1997) *Westminster Bible Companion: Matthew*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. p.74

our blessings is a way of flipping the difficulties in life into opportunities. When a child is sick, this is an opportunity to spend time with them and cuddle. That child will grow up and the relationship will change. If we need to pay our mortgage,⁵ it's an opportunity to honor a commitment that we have made. Jesus is imploring us to look at the gifts we have been given, to take a moment and trust in God.

This scripture is ultimately about the trust we put into God and how that shapes our lives.⁶ We must first trust God in order to provide the opportunities to fulfill our needs. When Adam and Eve were kicked out of the Garden of Eden, humanity had new responsibilities to carry out daily chores. Today they include things like: buying clothing, paying for housing, cleaning, purchasing groceries, and cooking. If we focus solely on our independence we forget that God is the reason behind everything we have. If God had not given us gifts and talents, we would not have the wealth, the security, the ability that we do have.

The lesson in Matthew on focusing on our blessings is also in Luke's Gospel. The Gospel of Luke adds, "with great gifts come great responsibility."⁷ When we remember the reasons for our blessing, we are able to trust a little deeper in God's love.

This scripture might be used by those who uphold the prosperity gospel. I could see someone saying, we do not need to worry about where we will sleep, what we will wear, or what we will do. God has everything handled.⁸ That's not quite grasping the point. Instead, the scripture is inviting us to imagine a world where we focus on God's blessings. Jesus is asking us to have a vision when he says, "Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them."

In Jesus' time people were every bit as concerned with food. They may not have had the perfect meal, but they did labor for hours in the kitchen. They also worked hard and had fashions they preferred. Jesus is inviting us to look at the creatures God has made: splendid in their beauty. This will help us to not get as overwhelmed with earthly concerns.

Tomorrow, we celebrate Thanksgiving. It is a time when families remember their blessings, when we as a nation remember the blessings in our lives. It is a time when there will be pictures on every social media of the foods we are enjoying. TikTok will be filled with Thanksgiving fails and successes. What I think God wants for us to do is remember our relationship with God.

Before we inhale the feast we could enjoy the conversation and focus on gratitude for what we have. Rather than worrying about getting the perfect family picture (which I am certainly going to try for), we could appreciate the loving family that God has given us. Let us spend more time focused on God's love, as we continue to give God thanks. Amen.

⁵ Metzger, B.M.; Coogan, M.D. (editors). (1993). *The Oxford Bible Companion*. New York: Oxford University Press. p.75

⁶ Throckmorton, Burton H. (editor). Toronto: Thomas Nelson & Sons. (1967) *Gospel Parallels*. pp.27-28

⁷ Luke 12:48

⁸ Ewart, D. (2011). *Holy Textures*.

<https://www.holytextures.com/2011/02/matthew-6-24-34-year-a-epiphany-8-february-25-march-3-2-sermon.html>