

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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At first glance, today's gospel reading seems insensitive to the realities of 2020. After all, we're living in the midst of a pandemic that has led to record unemployment, surging deaths, economic uncertainty, and an anticipated doubling of worldwide food insecurity¹. In the midst of all of that going on, we heard Jesus say, "do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" Actually, Jesus, at this point, "no." We are in survival mode. With the travel industry and many others facing mass layoffs and furloughs,² we know that food and drink matter. With countless leaders of the United States and even our president testing positive for COVID, we know the importance of the breath of life. And, with that virus potentially looming with every breath, we know that the clothing on our faces known as masks *do* matter.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/11/business/covid-hunger-food-insecurity.html>

² <https://www.usatoday.com/story/travel/2020/09/30/covid-19-travel-industry-layoffs-could-start-congress-fails-act/5868989002/>

With so much of our world crumbling, it seems trite to focus on lilies and birds, to bless animals, and to talk about God's gift of creation. Yet, what is often true about Scripture is that looking at only a few short verses can lead us into inaccurate and harmful interpretations. To understand a text, requires context. So, let's do that.

Today's reading followed a summary statement from the last section where Jesus said, "You cannot serve God and wealth." And, if we were to continue reading after today's gospel, we'd be reminded that God knows our need for food, drink, and clothing, and he says to "strive first for the kingdom of God and its righteousness, and all these things [that is, food, drink, and clothing] will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:32-33). You see, Jesus is *not* saying that food, drink, and clothing are insignificant. Those things *are* important. But rather, Jesus called his followers to, first and foremost, be concerned with bringing about God's vision for the world and to seek divine righteousness, which is a fancy way of saying that we should live in right relationship with God and others through loving generosity.

You see, Jesus looked at the big picture. That is, if we all work for and embody justice, then all will have their needs met. So too, if we acknowledged the truth

communicated by plants and animals, then all humanity could live abundantly. So, Jesus invites us to, well, consider the lilies and look at the birds. That is, to view the world broadly as we strive for justice and peace. For, far too often injustice and conflict stem from an imbalance power dynamics. An imbalance that can be derived from worry and fear. Worry that we don't have enough food, drink, or clothing—or, as was the case in the early pandemic, toilet paper, paper towels, and hand sanitizer. So, in our fear and worry, the world is thrown out of balance. Yet, Jesus says, consider the lilies and look at the birds. They do not stockpile wealth for generations. They do not hoard resources for their own. And, they have the needs for food, drink, and clothing met each day. So, consider the lilies and look at the birds.

And, gosh, what a perspective that is offered for us today. This is God's vision for the world! It's a vision where just distribution of food can feed the world, *and* the thing is, researchers tell us that we already have enough food. We have enough that is going to waste. It's not a problem with production, but it's a distribution problem.³ So, consider the lilies, and look at the birds. There is enough.

³ <https://medium.com/@jeremyrdman/we-produce-enough-food-to-feed-10-billion-people-so-why-does-hunger-still-exist-8086d2657539>

What an amazing gift that today's gospel gives us. It's one that I know so many of us have grown to appreciate during the pandemic. The pictures of trees, streams, birds, bugs, lilies, and lilacs that you all have shared with our community tell me that it's true. For, you and I—we—see these beautiful gifts, and now Jesus is inviting you and me—us—to *learn* from them. Jesus invites us open ourselves to the lessons that plants and animals share about justice and God's vision.

So, today, as we sit in the midst of all that the pandemic has brought us consider the lilies and look at the birds. Allow our beloved animals and plants to teach us God's truth.

The truth that God always provides more than enough.

The truth that God cares for all creation.

The truth that you and I—we—have a calling in our baptisms to share these gifts, to work for justice, to strive for peace.

And, so, today we come to celebrate the gifts of our beloved animal companions who bring love, joy, and support during all of life's ups and downs.

We gather at God's table to taste the abundance.

We come to consider the lilies and look at the birds, for they are God's teachers.

Amen.