

# Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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In today's gospel, Jesus said, "do not worry about tomorrow." For some of us, that's easier said than done. After all, there is so much to worry about: Climate change. COVID. Where our career path or family life might take us. We wonder if we'll ever meet the partner we yearn for. If we'll have enough money for retirement. If the treatment will work. Or, what the test results might say.

With all of that, it's sometimes hard to move past the worry and then, take serious what Jesus said in verse 33. There, he said, "But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." In other words, focus on God's reality and God's justice, and the rest— that is, food, clothing, and basic needs— will come. This can be a bit of a mindset shift from what we're used to thinking about.

After all, one way psychologists have helped us think about our health is using Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Oftentimes you'll see this hierarchy as a pyramid where physiological and safety needs are the base for the higher callings of love, belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. At first glance as seems as though Jesus is in opposition to Maslow. But, if Jesus and Maslow were to chat, I think they'd agree. After all, Jesus is NOT saying that food, drink, and clothing are insignificant. Rather, Jesus **IS** saying is to not obsess about the basics, don't get so caught up in them so that you're unable to thrive or see beyond them.

With this statement, Jesus asked us to consider a mindset shift. A shift that moves us from surviving to thriving. An acknowledgement that we are created for more than getting by and making it through. Rather, God's reality is one of abundance. God has provided, and we are loved beyond measure.

Take for example our short reading from Genesis. We heard God say, “It is not good for the earth creature to be alone.” Right away, we see that God cares for humankind and wants what is best for us. Then, on the spectrum of surviving to thriving, God’s actions seem to lean toward thriving. It’s beyond food and drink, and it was towards a future that is deeply relational. A relationship that was first cultivated with the wild beasts, the birds of the air, the cattle, and all the wild animals. A relationship where the earth creature came to know these creatures in an intimate way to name them. A relationship where the earth creature found connection with that which also came from the soil. A relationship that was deep, rich, and intimate. A relationship that gave way to naming these creatures.

That naming of the creatures isn’t a throw-away statement. Rather, there’s something powerful about naming. If you’ve ever adopted a pet from a shelter, you’ve probably taken home an animal called cinnamon or sparkles or bark-ly. And, when you finally bring the animal home, there’s a decision to be made. Do you keep the name the shelter gave or does another name seem to better capture the animal’s essence? For example, one of our cats came with the name “baby cakes.” Now, that name did not fit her personality at all. Through time and relationship, she communicated how she was such a cute little nugget, and so she’s now known as “nugget.”

These animals that the earth creature named and the pets that we love are our companions to share in a thriving life. They help us to realize that food is important but it’s not the end all (most of the time). Because, well, belly rubs, long walks, and chasing a dot are also important. Jesus reminded us that there is more to life than amassing wealth, seeking the best clothing, and worrying about what tomorrow will bring. Rather, as we seek to bring about God’s vision by serving, forgiving, and sharing our abundance, we will come to thrive in an entirely new way. We will come to experience God’s gift of abundant life all around us.

Then, we, like St. Francis, will see God's presence in those places we might have overlooked. Like St. Francis, maybe we'll begin to call the birds our "little sisters" or the sun and the moon our brothers. Perhaps we'll begin to see that we are all interconnected. That from the earth we were given the breath of life and, so too, God created all creatures from that same soil. Together, we all have been given so much by our God. We are loved beyond measure. We are fed with the gifts of God's earth. We are encouraged not to only focus on survival, but instead live a life that thrives in abundance. After all, if we all focused on loving our neighbor and caring for those in need, then indeed, no one would worry about clothing and food for these needs would be met for all.

So, friends, sitting for so long can be hard for our furry pets, so I'm going to wrap this up. Today, let your pets and the natural world be our teachers. They are gifts from God to remind us of God's love and to open our eyes to a world of abundance. Be encouraged to see God's vision come to life, that if we all focus on loving, giving, and serving, then the basics will be covered. So, do not worry. Rather, be sent forth with God's love, God's provision, and God's desire for all of creation to thrive. Remember, the lilies and the birds for they survive, and God has given us the gifts to thrive. Amen.

