When Life Gets You Down, Look Up!

2nd Sunday After Pentecost – June 10, 2012

The Sermon Text – Matthew 6:24-34

24 “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

25 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

28 “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

One of the most popular activities at summer camps these days are ropes courses. Various activities performed on ropes above the group help to instill confidence in individuals…and teamwork in groups.

Ropes courses come in two varieties. First there are the "low ropes courses" where all the activities are done close to the group. Then there are the "high ropes courses" where the participants are generally somewhere between 25 and 50 feet off the ground.

Even though both low and high ropes course participants where helmets and safety harnesses which make the activity extremely safe, some people still become afraid especially when doing activities high off the ground. And so, on high ropes courses, the first thing you are told is, "Don't Look Down." Why? Because looking down often fills you with fear.
Everyday life can be a lot like a high ropes course. Sometimes...when you look down...on what is going wrong in your life...it's like looking down from a great height...and you can become paralyzed by fear and worry.

Our Lord Jesus knows what we're going through. And so in today's text he encourages us:

WHEN LIFE GETS YOU DOWN, LOOK UP!

We may think that life is rough today, but it's a piece of cake compared to what it was in Jesus' day. Today, hardly any Americans have every known what it's like to be really hungry. In Jesus' day...when it didn't rain...the crops didn't grow...and there was no food...and you went hungry for days and even weeks on end. Today, hardly anyone wears worn-out clothes or goes barefoot because they have to. In Jesus' day, when money was tight, you walked around in rags and barefoot because there was absolutely no alternative.

So when the people of Jesus' day looked down at their lives, it was often a sad sight...and the uncertain future frequently filled them with worry. But two times in today's text Jesus tells his disciples, Do not worry.

Jesus was not forbidding them from thinking about their earthly needs. Of course you have to think about food and shelter. If you have a family and you know that your kids will be needing bigger clothing and new shoes, of course you will do what you can to prepare for it.

No, when Jesus said, Do not worry, he was telling them, "Don't look down at your earthly life ...and at the future...and be paralyzed by fear."

Why? Jesus answers that question when he asks, Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? In other words, worrying about the present or the future doesn't help. In fact worrying frequently makes the situation worse.

But when Jesus said, Do not worry, he was telling them something more important that the fact that always looking down and worrying never helps anything. He was telling them that always looking down on what is going on in your life not only paralyzes you in panic, but it messes up your perspective. Jesus also asked his disciples who were prone to worry about food and clothing, Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?

Jesus is telling us an important truth here:
1. Always Looking Down Doesn't Just Lead To Useless Panic, But Also Messes Up Your Perspective.

When an individual only thinks about his worldly needs, he tends to think that those are the most important need – the only things – in life. It becomes the only thing that you think about. And what you think about all the time becomes your master.

Jesus said,

*No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money* – and the world translated as "money" in the NIV and "mammon" in the KJV means the things of this world.

Jesus' words lead each one of us to ask ourselves, *"Who or what is our master? What occupies our thoughts during each day? Are we completely devoted to the Lord…or to the things of this world?"

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So, what's more important than earthly needs – the things of this world – you ask. What will happen after this earthly life is infinitely more important than earthly needs. After this life, all the stuff that we have accumulated during his or her life, doesn't matter, does it? There are no space for carryon luggage in caskets. And conversely, all the rotten stuff that happens during this earthly life is instantly gone once you stop breathing, isn't it?

But what will happen after this life? The Lord Jesus says in John chapter 5:

*A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear [God's] voice and come out – those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.* John 5:28,29.

The Lord Jesus is not saying that those who have done more good than evil will rise to live with him forever in heaven. He is saying that those who have done only good will rise to live with him forever in heaven.

And it is because of those scary words of the Lord Jesus that he says in our text not just to look down, but to look up and:

*Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.*

If we just keep looking down at what is going on in our earthly lives, we will miss what's really important. We need to stop just looking down and look up. For only when we look up – look up to the cross – can we see God's kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world. Only when we look up to the cross can we find the
righteousness – the holiness – that we need alone in Christ. For it is at the cross that he washed our sins away with his blood. And it is at the cross when he said "It is finished" that his holy life became our holy life in God's eyes.

When life gets us down, we need to look up to the cross to see that we have something that all the money in the world cannot buy – the forgiveness of sins and God's promise of eternal life in heaven.

That's why the hymn writer could say, "Take the world, but give me Jesus." For when we realize that we have him, we have it all.

But the Lord Jesus doesn't just want us to look up and see that in the forgiveness of sins we have something more valuable than anything here on earth. When we look up, we should also see that we have something more.

The Lord Jesus tells his disciples to **look up, look up at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?** What's the answer to Jesus' question? Of course we for whom the Lord Jesus died are more valuable to our heavenly Father than the birds of the air. So if he takes care of them, he will certainly take care of us.

He goes on to say, **Look up and see how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?** What's the answer to Jesus' question? If he makes the wild flowers which only live for a little while so beautiful, of course he is going to take care of us.

2. **Looking Up Doesn't Just Give Pardon From Sin But Peace Through Every Storm Of Life.**

Charles Lindbergh, the first man to fly solo across the Atlantic in 1927, wrote in his diary that shortly after he took off from Long Island, he encountered a huge storm. Wherever he looked – ahead of him, below him, to his right and to his left – he saw only fierce storm clouds. "I had not place to go" he writes, "but up. And when I did I broke through the clouds into the glorious sunshine."

The same is true in our lives:

1. Only looking down at what is happening to us not only leads to useless panic, but messes up our perspective.
2. Looking up to the cross, on the other hand, not only gives us pardon from sin but the peace that we crave in our earthly lives.

So follow Jesus' advice: **When Life Gets You Down, Look Up...And Find Out What Living Is Really Like.** Amen.