

May 25 2014

**Scripture Lessons** ~ *Psalm 66, 67, No. 84*

*Acts 17:22-28*

*Matthew 6:25-33*

**Sermon**

*A Bird in the Hand Isn't Worth As Much As You*

As a little boy I remember my grandfather never met a western that he didn't like. If you want to a channel called Me TV, you can revisit those days if you want to on a Saturday. My grandfather loved reading Zane Grey, Louis Lamore, and he loved watching those TV westerns that are even on some channels today, High Chaparral, Bonanza, the Virginian, Have Gun will Travel, and of course the pinnacle Gunsmoke with James Arness, matter of fact I think it was a radio drama before it was a television show. I remember one episode of Gunsmoke that I started thinking about when I read the gospel lesson for Matthew for today. Marshall Matt Dillon, played by James Arness, is pinned down with another poor soul, in the desert by some desperados of some kind, and they were hostile, and the other man asked Matt Dillon in the face of certain death, "are you ever afraid?" and Matt had one of those pregnant pauses, and said just as a matter of fact, "a man who is never afraid, well he is just a fool". I thought of that passage with Jesus' lilies of the field discourse in the Sermon on the Mount, because Jesus speaks here of worry. And what is more at the root of worry than being afraid? What is more at the root of worry than fear? Fear of the unknown, fear of the future, fear of having enough of whatever we need enough of, fear of having the things taken away from you from someone or something. Human beings are often motivated by fear, motivated sometimes to great heights in preparation and innovation and benevolence towards others around us and to great depths, depths of anarchy, regression, prejudice and selfishness as well.

Now we certainly cannot put Matt Dillon in the same level as Jesus when speaking about fear, but I think Jesus would agree that fear is a pretty natural human emotion and though in more than one place he encourages his disciples not to be afraid. My suspicion is that he was aiming less at fear as an emotion and more at the crazy actions and responses from our fears, one of which is the topic of Jesus' words today, worry. And what better action to consider in uncertain times, times like the ones we live today than the opposite of living like the content and faithful people he calls each one of us. So let me begin to say that in my mind at least there is a great difference between worry on one hand and concern on the other hand. Concern I think has a rather rational aspect. Concern leads to sort of clear thinking and rational action. Worry on the other hand I think is debilitating. It

kinds of eats away at us like a cancer, it becomes an obsession, and it leads to sometimes hurtful and destructive behaviors to ourselves and others around us. So keeping that in mind, Jesus sort of cuts to the chase in Mathew 6 and goes right for our Achilles heels, as humans, he goes right to our material possessions, our worry about what we will eat, our worry about what we will drink, our worry about what we will wear. And first he says simply this; don't worry about any of these things. And I would add a fourth. Where are we going to live? And these are all the basics of life, and it is natural to be concerned about these basics. Concerned about them for ourselves, for our families, and also concerned about others around us that have these needs as well. And in difficult economic times especially if you have been thru a depression or recession or some kind of a catastrophe in your lives, you might worry about these basics of human need.

But if you can step back and look, there are very few of us who have true concerns for any of these things. Most of us have larders stocked with food, we have houses so large that we need help cleaning them; we have closets full of clothes when we can only wear one set at a time. We have by the worlds standards, more ample drinking water than any other place in the world. But Jesus takes this issue to the next level by applying that it is not just a material, not just an emotional, not just a physiological problem, but it is a spiritual problem. And his reasoning is very simple. Look around yourself at nature, at the birds in the air, look at the lilies in the field, look at God's good creation. By earthly standards, let alone in the great scheme of creation, the birds and the plants don't do much of anything, to take care of their own needs. They don't plant crops, they don't store into barns, they don't spin clothing, but what is the spiritual dimension that I am pointing to here? God, the God factor. God feeds the birds, God closes the lilies, and Jesus reasons, that if God cares for the critters and the plants in the world, and he knows what those things need. How much more will he care about us, the one that are his children, the ones he loves more than anything else in the universe. Now Jesus even adds fuel to the fire by going beyond food and clothing and shelter, to the greatest fear of all. He points to our own mortality, our own prospect of death, and he reminds us that we can't even add to the span of our lives by worrying and we might even take away that span but the stress we add to our lives by worrying. So what is Jesus getting at by encouraging us not to live lives of worry? Well at the basic minimum the minimum is that it will lead to contentment, it will lead to appreciation of life for who we are as people and the things that God has given us as blessings in this life. But Jesus as usual takes it just one step further, saying that it becomes a stewardship issue as well. Because if we are content, if we are thankful for the things we have, living in faith, not living in fear, that we will first God's kingdom, we will see the world around us and we will see our place in it far more clearly and finally we will live generously, sharing our blessings with others,

knowing that God will provide for our needs and be there with us in the good times and the bad times in life, thru God's son, Jesus. So hear again these words of Jesus, take them to heart and walk with them during this week. But seek first God's kingdom, and God's rightedness, not ours but God's and all these things will be yours as well.

Together we say, Amen.