

Daily Discipleship

Eighth Sunday after the Epiphany (A) – Matthew 6:24-34

Discipleship: *Following the Wise One*

Focus Question: *What does it mean to strive for God's kingdom and righteousness?*

word of life

“Strive first for the kingdom of God and [God’s] righteousness. . .” Matthew 6:33 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 6:24-34

The verses for today are a continuation of the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew’s gospel, the sermon is in many ways more than code of conduct. It is a description and affirmation of the promises of God given to those who trust and follow Christ. It is an acknowledgement that God’s future is breaking into the present through the life and ministry of Jesus, and this inbreaking profoundly changes how one looks at and lives life.

Those who follow Christ—his disciples—are given a description of what life in the kingdom truly is and can be.

1. *What does it mean to view the teachings of Jesus as affirmation of God’s promises?*
2. *How is that different than a code of conduct?*
3. *How do you describe the kingdom of God?*

The Sermon on the Mount begins, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. . . Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matthew 5:2, 6 NRSV). Jesus then articulates the life of one who dwells in a right relationship with God lives and relates to others (Matthew 5:21ff). He teaches the disciples how to pray the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9). And in the verses today, Jesus returns to the “kingdom” and “righteousness” themes as he teaches the disciples to “strive first for the Kingdom of God and God’s righteousness” (Matthew 6:33 NRSV).

4. *What does Jesus mean when he says to “strive first for the Kingdom of God and God’s righteousness”?*

Righteousness for Matthew is more than right conduct; it is living in light of the gift of a new relationship between God and the disciple. It is living a life which reflects whom God has made us to be rather than a list of requirements to be met to be a disciple.

5. *Describe what it means to be in “right relationship” with God and others.*

Striving for the kingdom is directing life toward God’s present and future sovereign rule. As the disciples learn to truly pray, “Your kingdom come; your will be done. Give us this day our daily bread,” their life perspective changes. Instead of using energy in anxious pursuit of food and clothing, one is able to submit to God’s rule and live in confident trust in God’s power to provide.

If God cares for all of creation—the birds of the air and the flowers in the field—certainly God will care for each one of the disciples. The lifestyle of the disciples is one of righteousness and grateful obedience—not as an entrance requirement to the kingdom but as a reflection of God’s presence in the person’s life.

6. *In what ways have you experienced God’s care of you?*
7. *What verse of this passage do you hope to remember during the coming week?*

word among us

There's a song by Bob Marley that has a light-hearted Calypso beat and these words:

*"Don't worry about a thing,
'Cause every little thing gonna be all right.
Singin': "Don't worry about a thing,
'Cause every little thing gonna be all right!"*

These are easy words to sing but difficult to live. Our lives are filled with anxiety; each passing day brings new challenges and demands. We worry about our health, our families, our community. Life is filled with anxiety.

1. *What are some of your worries as an individual?*
2. *What are some of your worries in your congregation? In your community?*
3. *How do you deal with your worries?*

The words of Jesus ring out in the midst of our anxious spirit: "Therefore I tell you, don't worry about your life and your body" (Matthew 6:25 NRSV) The same God who cares for the birds and the flowers cares for us. God knows our needs; and God calls us to truly trust that God hears the prayer we daily pray: "Thy kingdom come; thy will be done. Give us this day our daily bread."

4. *Why are we not to worry about bread for next week?*
5. *How does the Lord's Prayer lead to trust in God?*

"Give us **this** day." It has been said that worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows but today of its strength. Winston Churchill, the British Prime Minister during World War II, once said, "When I look back on all these worries, I remember the story of the old man who said on his deathbed that he had had a lot of trouble in his life, most of which had never happened."

"So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own," Jesus says (Matthew 6:34 NRSV).

6. *How do you personally keep from worrying?*
7. *What do you advise those around you who worry?*

Jesus answers, "Strive first for the kingdom of God and [God's] righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:33 NRSV) Trust in the relationship that God has established with you. Trust that God is with you. Look at how God provides. Look for the hidden blessings. God has made you God's child and claimed you as a disciple.

Thanks be to God!

8. *What do you hope you remember from this lesson?*

Prayer

O God, calm my anxious spirit. Help me to trust in your promises. Amen

Dig Deeper

Isaiah 49:8-16a

last word

Look for ways
God provides for you
this week.



Daily Discipleship

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