

disciples *not* to: “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear.”

There’s part of me that wants to object to this. Though it may be that I’m simply trying to justify my own underlying anxiety that never seems to go away.

Yet I *do* wonder if Jesus isn’t being - well, a little Polyannaish perhaps? - pretending all is sweetness and light, when in fact there is so much darkness.

“Don’t worry, Jesus? Are you serious? Can’t you see what the world is like? It’s not good, I’m telling you. And getting worse.” Or so we think.

Of course it may also be that I’m too full of pessimism. That when I focus so much on the *darkness* around me it’s almost impossible to see the *light*.



So let’s focus on the light. Let’s see how even the smallest and seemingly insignificant of God’s creatures matter more to God than you might think.

“Look at the birds of the air;” said Jesus.

One of the things Lindsay and I enjoy, on a nice morning, a Saturday perhaps, when we can linger in our back yard with a cup of coffee, is watching the birds flitting about.

We see many varieties, depending on the season. Right now there are flocks of young Robins who have yet to leave for a warmer place. And Chickadees, who stay all year. They seem not to be put off by our Saskatchewan winters.



See this Blue Jay attracted by the acorns in our Oak tree?

He collects and hides them somewhere. Though I do wonder if he knows where to find them when it’s 20 below, and the ground is covered with snow. It’s amazing to *me*, since I’m constantly losing track of things.

This is a wonderful time of year to see birds in their migration. I wonder if you’ve heard the call of Snow Geese passing overhead in the evening, and looked up to see the city lights reflecting off their bodies?

“Look at the birds of the air;” said Jesus. “They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.”

Somehow, these creatures are all looked after. Despite the dangers they face from prowling cats and shiny windows and preying hawks and all the uncertainties of weather and disease and food supply.

It's not that life has no challenges for them. But God looks after them, and gives them what they need.



Or “Consider the lilies of the field,” Jesus said.



In the Greek text that word for “lilies” is not referring to any particular species, but to a range of flowers that grow *wild* in God’s great outdoors. Flowers that are not planted or fed or watered by any human hand.

Like these flowers, growing in Grasslands National Park near Val Marie. They’re a *hidden* treasure. Because when you drive through the area, you might think the place is rather lifeless and boring. Just a vast empty landscape. Certainly not a miniature botanical garden.

But when you pause to get up close, in the spring of the year ... when you get down on your hands and knees to have a look ... the life you find there is quite astonishing!

What you discover is a hundred tiny flowers. Small, delicate things that push their way through the soil and burst into bloom, determined to have their moment in the sun.

The Grasslands environment is harsh. It’s very dry, and the wind is always blowing. It’s baking hot by mid-summer. And the winters are severe. But these native species are built for just such a place.

Jesus claimed their beauty surpasses even Solomon, the wealthiest and most powerful of Israel's kings. "If God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you - you of little faith?"

Well, won't he?



Jesus makes a point of telling us that the birds of the air "neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns" - unlike us humans with our frenzied focus on hard work - yet they manage to do quite well.

And in a similar way, "the lilies of the field neither toil nor spin." Yet they fare better than the best-dressed models in Vogue magazine or Gentleman's Quarterly. How do they manage it?

They *do* have a part to play. I watch those Robins hopping about on the lawn, ears cocked, listening for worms. (Or maybe they're tilting their heads so they can see.) It's not as though they do nothing and have their food handed to them on a silver platter.

And those flowers that bloom in our southern Grasslands: Many of them have clever strategies - unique leaves, or root systems, or the ability to lie dormant for long periods of time - to conserve what precious water there is.

They do their part. Just as *we* might rightly be expected to do ours.

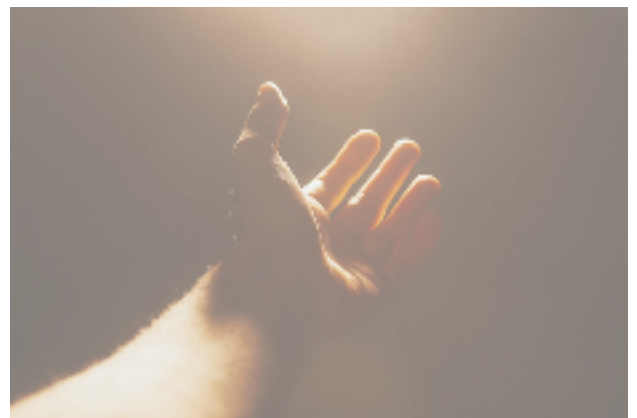


But listen: Ultimately, for them and us, and everyone - this is *universally* true - it is God who gives us life. ⁴

Earlier in the service, we read these words from Psalm 145:

"The eyes of all look to you,
and you give them their food in due season.
You open your hand,
satisfying the desire of every living thing."
(Psalm 145:15-16)

The Creator God is the source of life. We may work along *with* God. But we are always dependent on God's goodness and grace. And therefore we respond by giving thanks for the blessings we receive.



Which is what Thanksgiving is all about.



“Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”

“The Gentiles,” says Jesus - those who do not have a clear understanding of God - “they *strive* for all these things.” They work *so hard* to get them. But they’re missing the point.

You’re not missing the point, are you?



Do you know what the French-language term for this holiday is? Are you ready for it?

“l’Action de grâce.” A very literal translation might be “The action of grace.” *God’s* gracious deed of supplying what we need. And *our* act of response.



So “don’t worry,” says Jesus. Instead, “*strive first* for the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Can you see what he is doing here? I think it’s really very clever!

Jesus is re-directing the disciples’ attention. Changing their focus from *one* thing (which is worry) to *another* thing (which is God’s coming Kingdom).

“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ ... But strive first for the kingdom of God.”

Focus on *that*. Let it be the primary thing that occupies your attention day and night.



How many of you have done this *diversion trick* with a child who falls and skins their knee? I know I have with my own children.

They’re all in tears and consumed with pain. So you go and console them, hold them tight. Tell them you love them and everything will be OK.

And then, when you sense they may be ready, you try to help them think about something else, other than their scrape and all the stinging.

“Look,” you say, “maybe we should get some ice cream.” Or “Isn’t that a beautiful sunflower? Look how big it is! Let’s go see.”

And then, perhaps, the sobbing child will maybe sob a little less. “Yes,” snuffle, snuffle, “I do like that flower.” And then ... maybe you can both stand before it and admire it.



And before you know it, the sting is gone.

Not that it no longer exists. But other things *surpass* it.



Don't worry.

Now look, can you see this Kingdom? The marvellous reign of God. The realm of God's tender loving care. Where grace abounds. And tables are heavy laden, and cups filled to overflowing. A place of plenty, not of lack.

Let's dwell in that space for a moment. Focus on the light, not the darkness, and see what happens: How priorities may shift, and problems be resolved. How love for God and neighbour will grow. And peace come to fill our hearts.

Live in *God's* world. Immerse yourself in that. Seek it. Strive for it.



When we put God's realm first the world begins to change! It's not just how we look at things, but the *actual* world itself, with all its cares and strivings, becomes a different place.

When we live in the kingdom - *here and now* - when we do that, we learn to trust God's provision for our lives. We become less fearful, less pessimistic and anxious.

And we care for one another, especially those in need. We share our wealth. Give food to the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick.

We see ourselves as part of a *community* loved by God, and called to love our neighbours.

And that can make a huge difference to the way we live. And the attitudes that fill our hearts.

We grow more generous, more gracious with one another, as God is gracious to us. More forgiving of faults. More hopeful for a future that truly is in God's hands.

You open your hand, O LORD,
satisfying the desire of every living thing."
(Psalm 145:15-16)



Whatever worries you bring to worship on this day, may you find peace in the knowledge that God knows your need. And that God cares for you - even more than the birds of the air, and the lilies of the field. And that's saying a *lot!*

May the vision of God’s kingdom, given to us in Jesus, so fill you with light and love that you spread God’s generosity in the community of God’s people. And to every creature large or small. Not only on this Thanksgiving day, but every day. Amen.

