

**Sermon**  
**Community United Methodist Church of Coeur d'Alene**  
**Sunday, April 28, 2024**  
**10am**

Text: Matthew 6:24-34

Theme: Enough Provision: Trusting God to Provide

[prayer]

American environmentalist, farmer, and poet Wendell Berry has a beautiful poem you may have heard before called “The Peace of Wild Things.” It is perhaps his most famous piece of poetry.

*When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.  
I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.  
And I feel above me the day-blind stars  
waiting with their light. For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.<sup>1</sup>*

We probably all have had the experience of standing in line at the grocery store or sitting in a coffee shop or on an airplane and making small talk with a stranger. Eventually that stranger asks you what you do (or did) for work. In my case, when they find out I am a pastor, I normally get one of two responses: 1) They tell me where they go to church or 2) They tell me they *don't* go to church and then feel the need to explain why. A frequent explanation is “Nature is my church.”

My response is “That’s fine.” It’s a genuine response. I have had holy experiences in a congregation of Christians, and I have had holy experiences listening to the wind in the pines behind my apartment. God is not confined to our buildings;

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<sup>1</sup> <https://onbeing.org/poetry/the-peace-of-wild-things/>

trees and mountains and the ocean and even our backyards can feel like cathedrals, too. Indeed, Scripture tells us that human beings first encountered God in a garden (Gen 3:8).

We are attracted to the peace of these places. This is because, while every living thing has the instinct to survive, only human beings are preoccupied with the future. Other creatures do not “tax their lives with forethought of grief.” They do not sow or harvest or toil or spin against the unknown. Their peace comes from being rooted in the present. When we observe this peace, we sense the grace of God that we desperately hunger and thirst for.

God meant for us to have the same kind of peace as other creatures. But we lost that inheritance when we stopped listening to God’s voice and started listening to the voices of others. “Who told you that you were naked?” God asked Adam (v. 11). I imagine it was painful for God to realize that the human beings he had lovingly created no longer trusted Him to take care of them.

Jesus was alluding to our creation story when he taught the disciples not to worry about the necessities of life. “Look at the birds in the sky. They don’t sow seed or harvest grain or gather crops into barns. Yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren’t you worth much more than they are?” (v. 26).

This is a hard teaching! Of course we are worth more than the birds in the sky; we are made in the image of God, after all. But unlike the birds in my backyard, I must earn money to buy the food I need to live. I don’t have a coat of feathers and a nest in a tree; I have to purchase clothing and pay rent for my shelter, and the rent just keeps going up and up. Is Jesus really telling me not to care about where my next meal will come from?

Not exactly. Jesus doesn’t tell us not to care. He understands that human life is not self-sufficient; he knows that we have needs. This acknowledgment is implicit in his sermon. He was addressing the first disciples – men and women who had left their homes and families to follow him. Even as they chose voluntary poverty, they worried what this radical decision meant for their future wellbeing.

But these words of Jesus are not just for those first disciples; they are for all Christians in every place, whether rich or poor. Only some Christians receive the

vocation of voluntary poverty. They are supported by monastic and missionary orders within the universal Church. The rest of us cast ourselves upon the secular economy and toil for our daily bread. Many of us have experienced seasons where money was tight and wondered how we would make ends meet; some of us are even now managing increased expenses on reduced budgets, including your church staff (which is my plug to attend the budget presentation after worship today!). Jesus does not condone greed, but neither does he condone personal irresponsibility. Even Paul, our greatest apostle, had to make a living making tents. Work is one of the means that God uses to provide for us.

And when our honest work is not enough to cover our needs, the miracle of God's care for God's people is worked out through God's kingdom, where we look out for each other and share what we have. When the poor cry out for help, *we* are the answer to their prayer. "I was hungry and you gave me food to eat...I was thirsty and you gave me a drink...I was naked and you gave me clothes to wear" (Matt 25:35-36). The continued reality of poverty and all its consequences is not because God does not care; it's because God's people don't care *enough*.

The challenge before each of us then, whether we are rich or poor or somewhere in-between, is not to dilute the words of Jesus to fit the economic values of our time. His should make us squirm: "You cannot serve God and mammon" (v. 24). Mammon is a transliteration of the Aramaic word *mamona*; Aramaic was the language Jesus spoke. The root of *mamona* is *'aman*, which means "trust/reliance." So, the literal meaning of *mammon* is "the thing one puts their trust in other than God." Jesus uses the word *mammon* to provoke a stark choice in his disciples: Which do you trust more – God or wealth?

For three years as a seminary student, I lived below the federal poverty line to keep my student loan burden as light as possible. It took a lot of humility and discipline to stay within my meager budget, and the cost of housing today would make it impossible. But I believed that the will of God would not take me where the grace of God would not sustain me. I honestly think it was easier for me to believe that when I had fewer financial resources at my disposal. The more money I have, the more I understand why it is harder for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God than a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle (Matt 19:24). It's not that God hates rich people; it's just that wealth makes it harder to trust God because we are more easily convinced we don't need Him.

“No one can serve two masters” (v. 24). Discipleship is a constant process of letting go of everything in our lives that seeks to dethrone Jesus as our Lord and Savior. And the only way to truly let go is to trust that God is sufficient for our every need. Jesus teaches that if we are focused on wealth, we will always worry. We will worry about how to get what we seek. We will worry about how to keep what we have. And we will wonder: When is enough, enough? The fact that billionaires exist is proof that there is never an “enough” when it comes to money. Money is not the antidote to worry. Neither are the things we buy with it.

Do you know what sounds like *mammon* but means the opposite? *Manna*. “What is it?” asked the Israelites in the desert (Ex 16). They were hungry and pleaded with Moses to take them back to Egypt; at least they knew where to find food when they were slaves. But no one can serve two masters. And so, God gave them bread from heaven – only enough for each day – so they would learn to rely on God alone.

Jesus commands us to leave behind the values of our culture and instead live a life of trust and obedience to God. Our deep anxiety is that if we follow the command of Jesus, there will not be enough for our needs. But Jesus tells us not to be anxious about anything, because the One who calls us to the radical life of a disciple is also the Creator of the universe who lovingly provides for all of creation.

This is the solution to your anxiety about the future, says Jesus: “Desire first and foremost God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (v. 33). When we are focused on doing God’s business and living our lives out of God’s vision for us, we have no room or need for worry. The way to crowd out our fears of losing our dignity, status, money, home, family – even our own lives – is to replace them with a reverent fear of Jesus. Jesus commands us to replace one master with another. Replace your fear with the Master of the cosmos, the One who made the birds and the lilies and you and me with His very hands – hands that were pierced with nails for our sake.

Do you believe that God is enough? That God will provide enough for you to accomplish the mission he has given you as His disciple? Do you believe that if you prioritize your need for God first, then all your other needs will fall in line behind Him?

If we say “Yes, Lord, I believe,” and we mean it, then we will be freed to live lives devoted to the most meaningful thing possible: Ushering in the reign of heaven on earth.

Today we began a four-week emphasis on the spiritual discipline of enough. The first step is trusting that God will provide. So, drink deeply of the peace of God’s creation this week, friends. May the birds and the flowers remind you that you are more precious to God than these, and God is already taking care of you.

Amen.