

Thanksgiving Eve
November 25, 2009
Matthew 6:25-33

“Why Worry?”

Did you hear about the wild turkey on the New Jersey Turnpike? Sounds like an opening line to a joke, I know, but it’s a true story. A wild turkey took up residence at a New Jersey tollbooth and spent its days scooting around 18-wheelers and other traffic. State Fish and Wildlife officials netted the bird last week after many previous failed attempts. The turkey had been trotting around the busy toll booth since last spring, weaving around traffic at the 14B interchange in Jersey City, “one of the top five busiest toll roads in America,” said turnpike spokesman Joe Orlando. “She didn’t want to leave, she was a regular, and to be honest with you, she probably had better attendance than a lot of the employees.” Wildlife officials believe the 11-pound female turkey may have taken a wrong turn out of Staten Island and become disoriented. She spent her days causing stunned truck drivers to slam on their brakes and prompting some spectators to run across several lanes of traffic to pose for pictures with her. Toll collector Robin Bonner and her colleagues nicknamed the scraggly bird “Tammy the Turnpike Turkey.” “I’m going to miss her when she’s gone,” said Bonner, who has been feeding the turkey Cracker Jacks and sunflower seeds. “Tammy has become the hit of the turnpike, she’s a good bird.” Turnpike officials finally decided to have Tammy removed after complaints from drivers intensified. The turkey kept wildlife officials at bay for nearly an hour as they crept around behind her with a net gun to try to capture her. After a few more trips back and forth across several lanes, she was scooped up, placed in a cardboard box, and driven to the Popcorn Zoo in Lacey Township (*from www.npr.org 11-23-09*). So, that’s one turkey who escaped becoming dinner for Thanksgiving.

Tammy the Turnpike Turkey seems to embody what Jesus is talking about in the Gospel lesson for this Thanksgiving Eve: **“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life... Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?”** (Matthew 6:25, 26-27). And so there is wisdom for us to learn from a turkey as we celebrate the national holiday of Thanksgiving. The message for this evening, based on Jesus’ words in that Gospel lesson, is entitled “Why Worry?” May the Lord’s rich blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word, for Jesus’ sake.

In truth, there are lots of things that we *could* be worried about this Thanksgiving: unemployment and joblessness now hovering at 10% nationally – much higher in some places; the increasing number of people who are in need in our communities, as evidenced by the ever-greater demand placed upon agencies like Koinonia; global terrorism and combating it – just to name a few. To be sure, these are all very big challenges and require the best thinking and resources that we can muster. In contrast to these things, the concerns that Jesus speaks of in the Gospel lesson may seem pretty small: **“... what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear”** (Matthew 6:25). And yet, if we stop to consider what is behind unemployment, need in the community, and the threat of terrorism, these may well boil down to the most basic of human needs that Jesus speaks of: food and drink, clothing and shelter, safety and security. How do we *not* worry about such things?

Jesus’ question to his disciples – and to us – is a good one, and a rhetorical one as well: **“And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?”** (Matthew 6:27).

The obvious answer is no, we can't add a single hour to our span of life by worrying. In fact, the opposite is true. Instead of adding to life, worrying takes away from life. Slowly but surely, life is drained from us, and the joy of living dries up with worry, anxious fear, and nervous care. The Lord Jesus wants so much more for us! The key to *not* worrying is that final verse in the Gospel lesson as Jesus tells us, **“But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well”** (Matthew 6:33). God's kingdom and his righteousness don't come to us by our fretting and fussing, by our worrying and working. Rather, these things come to us as a gift – something we don't earn or deserve. God's kingdom and his righteousness are not things we're entitled to, nor are these things ours by right. They are ours solely by grace – the free grace of God in Jesus Christ, in whose death we are given life. Not worrying begins with what this holiday is all about – thanksgiving. The antidote to worry is to stop and consider how much God has already blessed us in body, mind, and spirit. Even in trying and difficult times, the blessings are still there if we have the eyes to see them.

In his explanation to the First Article of the Apostles' Creed, Luther writes beautifully about what it means to believe in God the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth:

I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil. All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true.

And so on this Thanksgiving Eve, I say to you, “Why worry?” Our gracious God who loved us and gave his only Son for us, promises to provide for his children. Instead of worrying, let us turn our hearts to giving thanks as we strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, trusting that God will provide for all our needs. Amen.