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Seek First
Matthew 6:24-33

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink,^[i] or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ 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? ²⁷ And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?^[k] ²⁸ And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin,²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰ But 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? ³¹ Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ ³² For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But strive first for the kingdom of God^[l] and his^[m] righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ “So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

Wow. What important words for us today.

The COVID pandemic is worse than ever,
And the political environment is still divided, despite the election being over.
It’s easy to be worried and afraid, isn’t it?

And yet the Bible tells us Do Not Fear—365 times!

So what helps with our fear and anxiety?

Most counselors would say, **control what you can, and let go** of the rest.

And WHAT CAN WE CONTROL?

Only ourselves.

Only what we say and do, no one and nothing else.

We have to leave the rest to God.

Which is really hard in this time when we feel like there are *winners and losers*, or that we are *all losing*, especially when it comes to this *pandemic*!

But what if we are NOT LOSING, when it comes to our faith?

What if we can step out of the public arena and see that **God is still God**,
And Jesus is still our Savior,
And no matter what we face, we do not need to fear, **for GOD IS WITH US**,
Walking beside us, carrying us much of the way,
through the waters and fires of life! (Isaiah 43)

Both the Joshua passage and these words from Jesus in Matthew 6
remind us that there ARE things we CAN control.

We can control our CHOICES.

Joshua urges the people of God to make a choice—either serve God,
or serve the little false gods all around you.
But you can't serve both.

He goes so far as to warn them—you can't do it!
And they insist that that they can, and they will.
He says, you are witnesses against yourselves,
because there are **consequences** if you say you'll follow God and you don't!

Of course, we all know there are consequences to bad choices.
Sometimes we have to be reminded of that fact.
So Joshua lays it out for them, in **famous words** that most of us have seen on
plagues and pillows—
choose this day whom you will serve,
as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!

It's a **covenant with God**—a promise.
And we make such promises knowing that we may lose some of our commitment,
or some of our feelings,
But we will stay in relationship because of the promises made,
because of the covenant between two people, and we have our part to uphold.

Like Joshua, Jesus talks about doing the most important thing too—
seeking first the kingdom of God,

And he puts it right into the **context of fear and worry and anxiety**,
Just like our current situation, here in **November of 2020**.

Jesus encourages us to not worry about the details and needs of our lives,
because if God can take care of the lilies and the birds,
How much more will God take care of us, God's own children!
Jesus reminds us that we cannot add to our life,
or help our circumstances by worrying.
And God knows everything that we need.

And then he says those **words to live by**:

³³ But strive first for the kingdom of God^[j] and his^[m] righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Strive first for the kingdom of God.

So, WHAT IS the KINGDOM of God?

It's just like Joshua says—it's serving God alone, following God alone.

As Christians, it is following our Savior Jesus Christ.

It's asking ourselves constantly, **WWJD?**

what would Jesus say and do in this situation?

And how can I say and do that?

It's remembering that what we **say and do really does matter**—

and **God is the one who can help us** to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

How do we know what Jesus would do and say?

We look carefully at his life and ministry in **Scripture**,

But also to the **commandments** he told us were most important—
loving God and loving neighbor.

We hold it up to the litmus test of that one primary thing: **LOVE**.

Is what I am about to do or say---**out of love?**

Is this loving God? Is this loving my neighbor?

Taking control of what we can control

is one way we can help our fear and worry.

Surrendering the rest to God can help us out of an endless anxiety cycle.

A lot easier said than done, though, right?

Surrender isn't easy.

Taking charge of our choices isn't either.

In these times of fear and uncertainty,

We all seek security and peace,

But we often look for that in all the ***wrong places.***

We sometimes try to be God—and insist on being right and having our own way in the world, instead of surrendering life to God!

Or we swing the other direction, and don't take responsibility for our choices, we give into the addictions of our lives---of food, news, television, internet, alcohol, drugs, or other harmful activities.

In times like these, we often seek ***security and peace from the world.***

In things going the way we want them to go.

In life going along 'normally', whatever that is.

And if they are not going that way....life must be a mess.

But the security and peace we seek cannot be found in the world,

It's not in election results, or political leaders, or political parties.

It's not in any person or circumstance other than Jesus Christ.

That's because ***lasting security and peace*** can only be found in the ***kingdom*** of God.

In Bible terms, we are in a WILDERNESS time.

We are in a difficult season—with the pandemic and the politics.

Many people would say we've been walking through a valley...

And I can totally agree with that.

People are sick and dying, in ways we've not seen in our lifetime,

People are worried, and that's leading to more pain and suffering.

But you know what happens in the wilderness times in the Bible?

Wilderness times are known as ***LIMINAL spaces.***

Difficult places, with good outcomes.

The word *liminal* comes from the Latin word 'limen',

meaning ***threshold*** – a point or place of entering or beginning.

A liminal space is the **time between the ‘what was’ and what’s ‘next.’**

It is a place of **transition**,
a season of **waiting, and not knowing.**

And here’s the deal---Liminal space is where **all real transformation** takes place,
If we allow God to do that.

Author and Franciscan friar Richard Rohr describes this space as:

*...where we are betwixt and between the familiar and the completely unknown. There alone is our old world left behind, while we are not yet sure of the new existence. That’s a **good space** where **genuine newness** can begin....This is the **sacred space** where the old world is able to fall apart, **and a bigger world is revealed.** If we don’t encounter liminal space in our lives, we start idealizing normalcy. The threshold is God’s waiting room. Here we are taught openness and patience as we come to expect an appointment with the divine Doctor.*

Adapted from Richard Rohr, [Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer](#) (The Crossroad Publishing Company: 1999), 155-156.

Think about that for a moment.

The wilderness times, the liminal spaces—spaces like November 2020—
they are times when we are **leaving an old way of life behind**,
and **we don’t know what lies ahead.**

But—this can be a **GOOD space**---because we can find **newness!**

This is a **SACRED space**—
because when the **old world FALLS APART**,
a BIGGER WORLD can be revealed!

Did you hear that?

When the old world, the old ways fall apart---

that’s when **God can show us a bigger and better world!**

If we are **hanging on too tight** to what ‘was’, we can **miss** what ‘can be’!

Sure, the **temptation is to idealize “normalcy”.**

How often have we said, *when will everything get back to **NORMAL?***

But what if that’s **not going to happen?**

And what if that’s **not the right goal?**

What if we really are in **God’s waiting room**—waiting to see the **divine Doctor?**

What if we are entering, especially during COVID times, **a NEW BEGINNING**,
for each one of us, and for the whole church?

So much has changed, and is changing.

What **HOPE** is there to be found—
right now?

I believe in these times of **polarization and division**,
As Christians we always have something in **common**,
Something that can bring us **together**.

And that one thing is our **FAITH** in Jesus Christ.

Truth is, **Christians can have the deepest respect for one another**,

Despite our differences,

We can agree to disagree,

We can have **unity amidst diversity**,

Because we are all seeking the same thing—the **same kingdom** of God.

We are all following the **same person**—Jesus Christ.

In the world you have to see things the same way,
look the same, sound the same, vote the same,
live and work and love the same way.

In the body of Christ we can be different, and still be ONE body.

You know, in Matthew 18:3

Jesus says that we should **become like children** to enter the kingdom of God,

And what's one of the main differences between children and adults?

In the hard times, in what we might consider the **impossible** times,
children can still see many **possibilities**!

Imagine giving a kid **a stick, and a bowl**.

We adults see a little stick and an old bowl.

What do they see?

Suddenly they have a drum set, or a walking stick,

a place to collect bugs, a way to make mudpies..the list goes on and on!

Adults usually see a difficult situation, something that seems impossible,
and we can't see a way out!

Give that same situation to a child,
and you've got yourself a new path.

What if God can help us see the world that way?

How can we ***become like children*** when it comes to today?

How can we look at all that is around us, and ***see the kingdom of God?***

You know, God is the one who got the ***Israelites through the wilderness***—
from slavery in Egypt all the way to the Promised Land,
with divine water, food and protection along the way.

That experience ***made them the people of God***.

That liminal space opened up ***a new world*** for them, a world of faith.

It was there that they received the 10 commandments,
and learned to create a space for the divine presence.

It was transformative.

Will we allow God to transform us—right now—in our liminal space?

You know, this commitment to seek first the kingdom of God,

This commitment to choose whom we will serve,

It is not just about us as individuals,

it's about us as ***a community of faith***, as the body of Christ.

We have to choose as a church to serve God, and only God.

Not the wishes of members or visitors,

Not the changing tides of the world,

We have to choose to serve God and only God.

To follow Jesus, and only Jesus.

We have to choose to seek the kingdom of God—

not any other kingdom.

The truth is, ***no matter what happens*** in our country, or our world,

we are still called to do the faithful things we've been doing,

as we seek to follow Jesus Christ.

We still worship God.

We still feed the hungry,

We still love our neighbors,

We still laugh and enjoy one another,

We still show compassion and empathy.

Nothing needs to rule our lives, except the love of Jesus Christ.

Today is our ***Pledge Sunday***, and it might seem like a strange time to be talking about financial pledges for next year.

But maybe it's not.

Because ***stewardship is about our choices.***

The choices we make about our ***Time, our Talent and our Treasure***,
Which has everything to do with ***seeking first*** the kingdom of God!

Friends, hear the ***Good News of the Gospel*** today:

During these crazy days, and this liminal space,

May we ***seek first the kingdom*** of God,

And may we ***allow God to change us, to transform us,***

to make us ***new creations*** through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And for the gifts of this time and place, all God's people said, Amen.