

**Matthew 6:19-24**

**Lent 3: March 8, 2026**

**Rev. Heather Carlson, St. John's Presbyterian Medicine Hat, AB**

### **Seek first the kingdom of God**

"Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink... or what you will wear."

In the middle of this teaching Jesus gives a simple instruction that holds everything together:

*"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness."*

Everything else Jesus says about worry flows from that one sentence.

Jesus is not indifferent to material needs. He is not naïve about hunger or clothing. Most of the first readers of Gospel of Matthew were ordinary working people. Some were poor. Many lived with little security.

These words are not legalistic commands meant to shame those who struggle.

Yet seeking God's kingdom first reshapes three things in our lives:

1. Our community — we share one another's needs.
2. Our contentment — we learn the grace of enough.
3. Our focus — our hearts become single-minded rather than divided.

### Community

When we hear the whole sermon, we remember that Jesus is addressing a community of followers, not isolated individuals.

These are the people he has just taught to pray, *"Give us this day our daily bread."*

They are the same disciples he has instructed to give to the poor quietly, without making a show of it.

Part of the reason we are not to worry about food and clothing is that these needs are meant to be shared within the community of Jesus' followers — the church.

These responsibilities belong to all of us together.

That is why we have a Care & Share fund.

Why we give through Presbyterians Sharing and PWS&D.

Why we support the Salvation Army, the Mustard Seed, and the Women's Shelter.

It is also why we support systems that care for the vulnerable — medical care, education, employment programs, and support for seniors and people living with disabilities.

But community care also means:

We are people who ask each other for help.

When we cannot get to church on our own.

When we are searching for employment.

When the food bank hamper will not stretch to the end of the month.

We are never meant to be isolated in our need, or alone in our concern.

Jesus expects that the needs of his followers will be shared among them.

I remember when email was new and our church adopted it. People would send out requests:

Does anyone have a punch bowl?

A hedge trimmer?

A playpen?

A vehicle?

A spare bedroom?

Others offered extra tickets, banquet leftovers, clothes, books, rides, even a barbecue.

It was joyful generosity — the community meeting the needs of one another.

Seeking first God's kingdom also shapes our contentment — we learn the grace of enough.

Jesus says:

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

“Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.”

One of our great struggles is the desire for more.

We want delicacies, finery, grandeur.

We are unpracticed at recognizing *enough*.

Instead, we follow the voice of advertising into a restless pursuit of more, and more, and more.

I remember a moment when I realized how hard it is to recognize “enough.”

When I worked at the Salvation Army in college, employees could buy clothing for half price. At first it felt like a great deal. A sweater here, a shirt there.

But one day I opened my closet and things were packed tight on the hangers. Drawers were full. There were clothes I had forgotten I even owned.

And standing there, I had this uncomfortable realization:

Even at half price of their store prices, I still didn't know when to stop.

I had to ask myself: When will it be enough?

This restless pursuit has been named *affluenza* — a condition marked by materialism, entitlement, and dissatisfaction even in the midst of abundance.

There is nothing wrong with earning a living. But when money or possessions become the master, they begin to give orders.

They tell you where to live.

How much you must work.

When you are allowed to rest.

How you measure your worth.

Jesus speaks plainly: “*You cannot serve both God and wealth.*”

Wealth constantly whispers that enough is never enough.

But God leads us toward contentment by reminding us of something deeper.

Jesus says: “*Are you not of more value than the birds and the flowers?*”

This is not a put-down of birds or wildflowers.

It is a declaration about you.

You are not a mistake.

You are not excess.

You are not unimportant.

You are valuable to God.

And because God treasures you, you do not have to prove your worth by how much you accumulate or achieve.

When Jesse Jackson organized the church communities facing economic injustice in Chicago, people gathered and declared together:

“I may be poor, but I am somebody.

I may be on welfare, but I am somebody.

I am Black. I am beautiful. I am a beloved child of God.

I must be respected and protected.”

Through Operation Breadbasket, they challenged businesses that were happy to sell products in Black neighborhoods but unwilling to hire or promote Black workers.

Their declaration — *I am somebody* — allowed them to stand against systems that demeaned them. When you know you are treasured, money loses its power to define you. Seek first the kingdom of God. This shapes our focus — our hearts become single-minded rather than divided.

The Greek root for the word translated *worry* carries the idea of being divided. Different parts of our lives pull in different directions until we cannot hold ourselves together. Jesus keeps returning to this theme:

“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

“No one can serve two masters.”

“You cannot serve God and wealth.”

When we try to hedge our bets and cover every possible base, our dividedness becomes worry. Even the English word *anxiety* hints at this reality. Its root means “to choke.”

Worry quite literally chokes the life out of us.

It tightens our chest.

It narrows our vision.

It constricts our joy.

When Jesus tells us not to worry about food or drink or clothing, he is not saying these things do not matter.

The issue is priority.

There is stiff competition for first place in your life.

If you do not intentionally seek God first, something else will quietly take that place — money, reputation, family expectations, political fears, or personal comfort.

Jesus is not saying we should stop working.

He is not saying we should not plan.

He is not saying churches should ignore budgets or broken plumbing.

He is asking a deeper question:

What comes first?

Jesus says:

“Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

Food matters.

Clothing matters.

Budgets matter.

Retirement accounts matter.

But they are not ultimate.

When they come first, anxiety follows.

When God comes first, freedom follows.

Jesus does not say: worry less so that God will love you.

He says: *seek first the kingdom of God.*

And when that becomes the center of our lives, many of the things we worry about begin to fall into their proper place.

Living without worry may sound as impossible as living without breathing.

But Jesus is not asking us to stop breathing.

He is inviting us to breathe differently.

Jesus invites us to breathe differently.

To inhale trust.

To exhale fear.

To inhale gratitude.

To exhale worry.

And as we do, we may discover that the life we thought required our frantic worry, actually required trust in our gracious and faithful God.