

November 24, 2019
Christ the King

First Presbyterian Church
21 Church Street
Pittsford, NY 14534
www.pittsfordpres.org
(585) 586-5688

Rev. Jim Widboom

A Thanksgiving Sermon

Matthew 6:25-34
November 24, 2019

I want to share two things I am thankful for this morning, based on the reading of this text. The first thing I am grateful for is work. I think work helps us see the provision of God in our lives.

The text says that birds neither sow nor reap or gather into barns, yet God feeds them. Just because they don't gather into barns doesn't mean they don't work. Look at the behavior of the sparrow. At our new townhouse the sparrows are rampant. They rummage the trees so fast you cannot see them. They are frugal and careful and never leave anything behind. Even if they don't gather into barns, they work very hard for their food, and in their work God provides for them.

So also, we work, with faith that God will provide. I am thankful for work.

In the music by Haydn, called *The Seasons*, there is a line in the summer section that extols work that brings the blessing of God: "O noble toil, from thee, comes every good. In thee all virtues grow, all manners rude are overcome, by thee the heart of man is cleansed, from thee all courage comes. O noble, noble toil, from thee comes every good."

I am thankful for work because in work we see the provision of God. One of the best programs the Rochester Psychiatric Center ran for years, was a work program for folks in the forensic unit. Staff had contracted with a work shoe supplier to fill orders for the shoes. Patients with sufficient privileges worked 10-12 hours a week, packing work boots in boxes and preparing them for shipping. Many patients saved money, a lot of money as time passed. It was work that made them thankful, stronger, and progressed their rehabilitation.

Work helps us see that God provides all our needs. An Eastman School tenor named Nils, caught my attention. My son's name is Nils and I began to follow this Nils' work at the Eastman school. I attended his senior recital. Usually paying no attention to his grooming, he came on stage for his recital sharply dressed and clipped, with the biggest smile I have seen from anyone for a long time. He sang very difficult music with confidence and energy. He didn't have an operatic tenor voice, but lyrical, and performed very well. At the end, there was great enthusiasm from his fellow students, shouting and cheering for Nils. The smile on his

face was an inspiration. All his hard work had resulted in a fine performance with great appreciation from fellow students.

He must have gone home grateful for all his work was worth. Work helps us see that God provides. I am thankful for work. It reminds me that God provides.

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I am also thankful for beauty. The text says, don't worry about clothes. Just look at the lilies of the field and how God clothes them, so also God will cloth you. When you see beauty in the world, you see that God provides for you, and for all of his creation. Beauty is a grace, that heals and brings inner joy.

After my first year of college, I came home from Chicago, and worked on a neighbor's farm. I so cherished returning to farm after a year in the big city where all the beauty of the world seemed spoiled. Much of that summer I spent cleaning a cattle yard and hauling manure to the same field day after day. In the early summer the wild flowers were blooming in the ditches, and believe it or not, I couldn't help myself, I stopped and picked wild flowers and took them home to my mother. I didn't tell my friends I did this. I did it because I knew she enjoyed the beauty of the natural world like I did.

The beauty of God's creation makes us confident that God provides for us, and all the world he loves.

I had a friend that summer who had spent a time working in Detroit. He was a farm kid who was also an artist. Not an easy combination. He came home, and from odd, old pieces of steel, lying around his farmyard welded together a beautiful sculpture showing the efforts of Detroit kids yearning for life. It was a beautiful sculpture. It sat in the farmyard, next to a flourishing field of corn. In a late summer, cool evening I remember how beautiful this seemed, of old metal welded together, inspired by the spirit of poor kids in a big city by a farm kid artist, next to wonderfully green cornfield. All together, it was so beautiful.

The beauty of God's creation—and the Lord gives us all an eye to see beauty—makes us confident that God provides for us and for all the world he loves.

Based on this text and teaching of Jesus, I am thankful for work and beauty, for they make me confident in the goodness of God and God's creation.

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Now the text for this morning also says, or Jesus teaches us, that the best way to avoid worry in our lives is to seek first, among all things, the kingdom of God, and that then all the things we need, clothes, food, shelter, and all these things, all that is necessary for life, we will find we have. Seeking first the lovely reign of Christ will bring to us occasions of great beauty and a confidence in the provision of God through the work we do.

So look at the sparrows and swallows and see how God feeds them, and be filled with faith that God will provide for you. Look at the beauty of the lilies of the field, and see all the beauty of God's creation, and be confident that God embraces you also with all the beauty of his creation.

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Now the text ends with some very realistic, down to earth, rabbinic kind of counsel. I love it. The last paragraph seems to say, or Jesus seems to say, that everything I just said seems just a little too perfect and so the Lord says, "do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today."

Let us be thankful for harvest this year, for the beauty that surrounds us, and for the work we have to do. There is much to be thankful for, and each day always offers at least one, if not many gifts from the Lord to be thankful for.