

Here's how the reading begins: **'Therefore I tell you,**  
OK, let's pause right here.

The word 'therefore' signals to us that something important has come before  
And that Jesus is about to draw a conclusion from what he has been saying.

But do you remember what he has been talking about?

Listen: **'No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.'**

Jesus is here not telling us to do anything – there are no commands

He is simply stating a fact; telling us about reality

And that is that we can't serve both God and Mammon

We naturally think that both God and possessions are things

That we bring into the orbit of our lives

And use according to our discretion

I'd say we generally have a consumerist way of thinking

About the material and spiritual worlds:

How do I want to spend my money to satisfy my wishes?

What sort of God suits my spiritual tastes?

But Jesus talks about God and Mammon as Masters

*As that which we serve and which direct our lives*

And he assures us that we can't serve both at the same time.

It's on this basis that he draws conclusions in the forms of commands

That we'll get into now.

But just before we do, one comment

I'm handing on Jesus' words, not my own.

I've had a very comfortable life, and if I gave this teaching

It would necessarily come across as naïve or cruel.

But Jesus went through much suffering

He gave this teaching after his 40 day fast, and on his way to the cross

He also gave this teaching out of self-sacrificial love

So, receive these words of Jesus that flow from his wisdom and his love

He says, **'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?**

Jesus commands us, who serve God, not to be anxious  
About the necessities of life - and food, drink, and clothing *are necessities*  
As Jesus will explicitly acknowledge as he progresses.  
But note the question that he asks in relation to our anxiety: **Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?**

In giving this command not to be anxious about these things  
Jesus works to relieve us from this sort of worry  
By teaching us that there is something to existence *more fundamental*  
Than the things that maintain bodily existence.

Jesus, in his temptation, a couple of chapters before today's reading,  
Had quoted Scripture: **"One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."**

In today's teaching he says that this is true not only for himself  
But also for us  
Jesus is giving us his word to broaden our perspective  
To free us from slavery to Mammon  
And to open our eyes to see that we belong to God.

Jesus then goes on: **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?**

Again, there is a command and a question

First Jesus commands us to look at the birds and to consider how they live

- As an aside here: we rightly understand Scripture as God's revealed word
- But note how Jesus in his word turns our attention to nature
- As revealing to us who God is, and who we are

Now birds are not lazy: they are always active in life

And they are fed by God as they live according to their nature.

*You could say they plan for the future:* they build nests after all.

But when they have done what they can do, they let God feed them.

Also: Jesus is well aware that birds die,

He explicitly makes mention of this in his teaching elsewhere

So what Jesus is saying to us is not that everything will always go smoothly

If we live like the birds, faithful to our calling from God

But that we *will* live as those who serve God, not Mammon.

The servants of God and the servants of Mammon: both die

But the servants of God do not have to be burdened from anxiety and worry

Jesus also assures us of the love of God for us in the question:

**. Are you not of more value than [the birds whom your heavenly Father feeds?]**

We need to hear from Jesus that we are valuable to God

If we are to be free to live unburdened by worry

About the necessities of life.

Jesus then goes on to develop his argument by asking more questions.

Listen to what he asks: **And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?**

This is a very practical question: when you worry about the necessities of life  
Does it help? Does it bring you alive?

This sort of worry has no good, practical outcome

Serving Mammon is impractical, it does not bring joy. It is useless: why do it?

Jesus then asks another question, and gives another command

Listen to what he says: **And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. 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?**

Again Jesus draws our attention to nature – to consider the lilies

But this time his commands us to note the beauty of these flowers

That no one in particular planted, that just grow in God's creation.

These flowers, Jesus says, have a beauty

That not even royal splendour can match.

Indeed these flowers fade and die: In fact Jesus uses the imagery

Of the grass of the field being thrown into the furnace

- This is not naïve teaching

But Jesus wants us to understand that if God provides

Even such transient things as the lilies of the field with resplendent glory

Then we can be assured that the heavenly Father will clothe us

The disciples of his Son, little though our faith is.

Then Jesus draws the final conclusion for today's reading:

**Therefore do not worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But**

**strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.**

First we have the repeated negative command, that we should not worry  
About what we should eat or drink or wear

But then we have the positive command, to strive for, or seek first  
The kingdom of God and his righteousness.

One word about 'righteousness': we could also translate it 'justice'  
Would it give a different picture to you if you heard it this way?

I think it's worth considering.

The last parable that Jesus gives in this Gospel

Is the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats

Where Jesus assures his disciples

That in the judgement of the nations, of the Gentiles

Those who feed the hungry and clothe the naked

Are welcomed into the kingdom of God

It seems to me that while Jesus is encouraging us to trust

That God will indeed care for us, and supply us with what we need

He is also encouraging us to act in righteousness, in justice

To those who do not have the necessities...

Of course when we listen what Jesus says

We do well not to consider only what he is saying

But who is saying it: Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God

When Jesus teaches, he teaches as the one who knows what it is

To be a human being, and to have real human needs

And he teaches us one who reveals to us the righteousness of God

Especially in his suffering, death, and resurrection.

So today we hear his teaching as people who have been called by God

In holy baptism into Christ

Who have been forgiven by God, who have his mercy and compassion

As dearly loved children of the Father

Who have been freed from servitude to Mammon, to serve the living God.

So let's give thanks to God for his abundant goodness in creation

For the beauty and splendour of all that has made

And for the freedom that we have in Christ Jesus to cast our anxieties on God

Because he cares for us. In Jesus' name. Amen.