

## THANKSGIVING VESPERS

Matthew 6:25-34

*First things first*

Its that time of the year again, when men dress like construction barrels and antlers stick out of the beds of muddy pickup trucks. Bars have “deer widow” specials for those left behind by their unshaven conquerors as their unshaven conquerors set up bar at their deer camps.

I must say I myself caught on a little late to the hunting thing, but I did take hunter safety class eventually, when I was in seminary. My buddy and I signed up to learn how to kill what we were supposed to kill and not each other. I felt like *Billy Madison* as we sat in class with a gaggle of twelve year-olds. Besides telling his stories of the one he got and the one that got away, our instructor told us that it was important not to forget where you are, because, when peering through binoculars at the rustling in the distance, it was easy to forget all those things outside the lenses. If you aren't careful, you might think you are shooting the infamous “tirty point buck” when you are really shooting your former best friend. Locking on to the horizon can cause big problems where you stand. First things first.

Similarly, I am hardly Davey Crockett, but I've put in some time in a tree stand. I haven't shot anything, but I've read a couple books and dragged several deer back to the truck, since, apparently, the young guy drags the deer while the old guy drinks the beer. One thing I do know, however, is that I will never get a deer if I don't get ready to get one. While I've heard a couple legends of orange iron men wrestling deer to death, I've never heard of someone shooting one with a gun that wasn't loaded. First things first: while that deer in your dreams might be mighty, it isn't as big as the bullet you've loaded beforehand.

*“Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”* First things first. Before you worry about God's providence in temporal things, learn to know His providence in eternal things. Be dressed first with the righteousness of Christ before you worry about your top hat and coattails. Hunger and thirst for the Bread of Life before you hunger and thirst for your daily bread. Sure, both are promised to you, and your daily bread may look big in your dreams, but I assure that it isn't as big as the Bread of Life.

Why do we worry so much about our daily bread and about having icing on our cake? I think it is because we all remember when we starved to death in the past. Oh, wait, we haven't starved in the past. So why do we worry? I think it is because worry makes the grain grow faster. Oh, wait, worry doesn't make the grain grow faster. So why do we worry? I think it is because worry dyes our hair young. Oh, wait, worry turns us gray. So why do we worry? I think it is because an hour of worry adds a day to our life. Well, by now, I hope you get the point.

I'll never forget my first football game in high school. It was an away game. The coach riled us up as we started the trip and Metallica kept us riled the rest of the way to Walled Lake. Then it was time to get off the bus. This was huge; this was the first time we'd run off the bus as a team. Girls would be watching, and so would the other team. The doors opened and out we ran, hollering like soldiers going to battle. And then it happened. Apparently, they had some rope around a patch of grass they were seeding and guess who was so focused on his big entrance that he wasn't watching his next step on the way. Who it was isn't important, but someone's jersey was dirty before he even played a down.

*“Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”* One step at a time. Today is today; tomorrow is tomorrow, and never the twain shall meet. Today will always be today; tomorrow will always be tomorrow. No one has ever woken up in tomorrow because, while yesterday we might have thought today was tomorrow, today today is today. Luther writes: “When we fret, we are fools,” and continues, “It would be a very foolish stunt were a man who is small in stature to seat himself in a corner and there all his life worry and plan how to become taller.”

The thing about worry is that it will never end, because there will always be what you don't have that you want or what you do have that you don't want and, unfortunately, the two are usually the same. What changes is our having or not having them, as what we want always looks more spectacular when we don't have it and more drab when we do.

You'll have what you need. How do I know? Because of this [pointing to the crucifix]. If God has given you His Son, how can we doubt He will give us a chicken nugget or a pair of jeans? If God has given you heaven, don't you think he'll provide what you need in this life on your way there? How can we suspect the hand of a God who has given Himself into death to give us life of being miserly? No, shouldn't we rather expect quite the opposite: that He will provide more than we need, if not always all we want, because, after all, getting everything one wants spoils a child.

There is a story of an old man whose house was being overtaken by a hundred-year flood. When his house began to fill with water, he climbed on the roof. The National Guard came by in a boat to save him, but the man turned them away with the reply, “I trust that God will save me.” The waters continued to rise so that the man's feet were wet even on the peak of his roof. A helicopter flew down with a ladder to save him. He turned them away with the reply, “I trust that God will save me.” The waters continued to rise and the old man drowned. When the man got to heaven he asked God, “Why didn't you save me? I trusted you.” God answered him, “I don't know what happened. I sent a boat and a helicopter. Didn't you see them?”

God has promised to provide for us. Most often, he does that through quite natural means, whether work, parents, the government or kind benefactors. But we ought not at such times be any less thankful, or any less amazed at His tender care and provision. Moses warns, *“Take care lest...when you have eaten and are full...you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day.”*

“Don't worry.” It rolls off the tongue, doesn't it? But it is true, what Jesus says, isn't it: that worrying does no good, that worry has never worked anything but trouble? God will provide; that is not a platitude; that is a fact. God will provide, whether through the labor of our hands or the kindness of another. So don't worry. I wish I could make it as easy to do as it is for me to say, but I can't. This [pointing to crucifix] should make it easier, though. *“Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”* First things first. After all, gratitude looks much better on you than anxiety, because Christians wear thankfulness almost as well as they wear Christ's righteousness. Amen.