**August 25th 2024 Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity**

**Text: Matthew 6:1-8** 0734

**Theme: A Secret Life.**

May the Spirit of Christ dwell in you all, that the works of the Spirit may flow from you in great abundance. Amen. Dear Christians: There is no doubt that times are very difficult right now for many including for many of us. The economy, despite all ‘reports’ to the contrary, has spiraled into a depression-like state, rivalling the times of the great depression. During times such as these inflation takes a serious toll on every person. Each one of us has had to deal with very high food prices, gasoline prices, housing prices, interest rates, among many other financial difficulties. In addition there seems to be no relief in sight for the average family. In fact many reports state that those things will continue to rise causing even more strain on families and their budgets. Likewise spiritual well being is very low, as it often is during hard times, not because God is adding salt to the wounds, but because man begins to blame God in sinfulness and wickedness. Men begin to wonder why God would allow such suffering in the world, and why God would allow things to get so bad for such an extended amount of time. Men, even Christians, cease to pray, they become angry, bitter, complacent, and the spiral continues to a very low point. Today we face the prospect of war, we face an ever growing number of diseases, corruption is rampant especially in the realm of politics, and everything has seemed to turn on its head.

There is a danger present in difficult times, danger that threatens the Christians well-being, not physically only, but spiritually. Satan uses physical pain as temptation to turn away from God, likewise with economic pain, societal pain, and the like. Each one is designed and used by Satan for the expressed purpose of causing us to turn away from God in our emotion. Just listen to these exchanges between Satan and God concerning the person of Job: *“Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth Thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the Lord said unto Satan, behold all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand.”* And when Job does not sin in spite of losing his wealth his family and his livelihood, we hear: *“And Satan answered the Lord, and said, skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the Lord said to Satan, behold he is in thine hand; but save his life.” (Job 1:9-12; 2:4-6)* Satan then sent disease and extreme pain upon Job, and the stated purpose of these things is to cause Job to curse God to His face, in other words, to fall away from faith and trust in God. A couple things here trouble us when reading these things. The first is that God gave permission for these things and we come to a realization that all things that happen are in truth allowed to happen by God, and that includes suffering. Secondly we are troubled to see just how much suffering can be inflicted, suffering which we seem to have barely embarked upon. For us, as Christians, it is of utmost importance to understand the intention of the things we face, and the power of the Holy Spirit in guiding us through them so that we remain children of our Father in heaven, and continue to bring forth the fruit of faith even in hard times. And never for our own glory, but the glory of our Father in heaven, done in secret. Let us then hear the Word of our Savior teaching us of love and of prayer. Let us then hear Him according to our text for today which is found in the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew beginning at verse one.

**Quote text here.**

Let us pray, O most loving Lord of heaven and earth, we come before Thee today strained and frightened because of economic, social, and political chaos. Lord we implore Thee to help us, to grant Thy blessing upon the work of our hands, and to increase Thy blessings upon us. Give us Thy Holy Spirit that we do not close our hand to our neighbor because of fear of the future, but as Thou givest liberally to us, so too, we give liberally to our neighbor. Teach us that nothing is impossible for Thee, and that Thou canst bless even in the midst of terrible conditions, or when we give of our own to others. Keep us from selfishness, from envy, and jealousy. Help us to keep in our sight the true value of earthly things, and the true value of eternal things, that having the proper perspective, we may not hoard for ourselves only the things we have been given, but look to the plight of others and help them to the best of our ability. Keep us from doing so for reward on earth, but for reward in heaven. Help us to do these things in secret, knowing that Thou seest all things. Grant O Lord, our prayer for the sake of Thy grace. Amen.

Guided then by the Spirit of God let us learn of a secret life of a Christian, one which engages in:

1. **Uncelebrated giving.** We read verses one through four of our text: **read verses here.** The natural reaction of the flesh when tough economic times come is to close our hands, to close our purses, to close our wallets, to ensure that each one of us and our families are well taken care of and secure for the future. Further the flesh loves the praise of other men, and so very often when we do pry our pocketbooks open for others we do so with the hope of receiving praise from our fellow man. Jesus addresses these things in our text, making particular note of gaining glory for ourselves, but also teaching the true nature of giving selflessly not selfishly. Now in difficult times this giving, or alms, becomes very concerning for many of us, after all we have our own families to care for, we ourselves need to eat and have shelter, we need gas for our cars, we need to protect our own jobs. Very often our flesh begins to get the better of us and we close our hearts for the plight of others, choosing to no longer see their pain or their troubles, and choose rather to focus only on ourselves. We see giving to the church of God as a burden and we either cease to give or we give grudgingly only because we fear what others may see or say. The apostle Paul says this: *“But this I say, he which showeth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give: not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.“ (2 Cor. 9:6-7)* Giving in a godly manner is done by a Christian by faith, by the Holy Spirit dwelling within him. Giving to the poor or giving to the church is always done in simplicity. It is done when no one is looking, when no one will give credit; it is uncelebrated, unrecognized, and unglorified. Hear what Jesus says: *“Whosoever shall give you a cup of cold water to drink in my name , because you belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.” (Mark 9:41)* I want everyone for a moment to think on the benefit of giving. First it obviously benefits those who receive from us whether it be money, food, or other needs; further though it benefits us, for giving teaches us a few things. It teaches us that we can rely on God, for He can and does provide for us even when we give some of it away. It teaches us also to have a proper perspective on the things of this world and their temporary nature. When we are not controlled by thee things, or do not set our affections on them, the easier it becomes to give. Now the benefit of giving to the church is obvious and hardly needs mentioned, but it should be mentioned. Giving to the church ensures the continued preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments which of course have the benefit for us of the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life.

Now what must be addressed here is concerns we have and face whenever we experience hard times. One is the thought of the flesh that God could simply make our lives good, that he could plant that hedge about us that Satan mentioned about Job, He could remove suffering, and yet He does not. Suffering remains, disease continues, poverty increases, and suffering is ongoing. Why does He allow this? Well some of the same thoughts and teachings from previously still apply here. He teaches us first of all not to be hung up on this world or the treasures found here, but to have our eye toward heaven. Second He is purifying us through the fire of affliction. This is necessary to put down in us the Old Adam which pushes to unbelief. Third it keeps us humble, so that we do not begin to believe as did Nebuchadnezzar that we have accomplished a great deal and take glory for ourselves, which is the primary thing Jesus is addressing in our text. Our theme is a secret life, not a secret life that hides sin and evil, but one which the Holy Spirit works within a Christian to do good deeds, deeds which follow God’s will, and to do them in secret, or in other words, to do them whether they are recognized or not. Thus do we see a secret life of uncelebrated giving by a Christian. Let us see secondly that in this secret life Christians also engage in:

1. **Uncelebrated praying.** We read verses five through eight of our text: **read verses here.** Now directly tied to the hard times and continued giving of a Christian is the life of prayer of a Christian, and Jesus ties the two together here, During these times inevitably we will worry, we will be anxious about the future, but Jesus after giving exhortation of Christians to give ties it to prayer when He says that our Father in heaven knows that we have need of all these things even before we ask Him. He knows that we need food and shelter, He knows when we struggle, and He knows when through faith we continue to sow bountifully despite our fear. He knows these things. Prayer is often one of the most misunderstood parts of the Christian life. Many think that prayer has something to do with the types of words we use; or that it is only a prayer when we have talked for an undetermined amount of time. However none of these has anything to do with a true and proper prayer. Rather all that is necessary is faith, and faith will always pray according to the will of God when asking for temporal things and unconditionally when asking for spiritual things. When done in faith, that is, with trust that He will hear and answer a prayer can be said in any amount of time, with even just a word or two. It does not need to be some grand production using ‘church’ words, but even a little in a very simple way can pray a true and proper prayer.

Now when we endure such times as we currently experience, the prayer life of a Christian becomes even more important, for communing with God strengthens us, it uplifts us, and we can unload the burden that has been upon us onto the Lord. We may not be able to handle a certain situation, but God can; He has it well in hand. Trust in Him, for He will deliver us. If not now in this present world then in the life which is to come. Dear Christians, let us not love in word only, but in deed and in truth, knowing that our eternal life is secure, let us pray in faith for our own welfare, the welfare of our neighbor, our government, our nation. Let us pray that God would deliver us from all evil of body and soul, property and honor. Let us be liberal givers to our neighbor and to our church that the Gospel might be propagated and that it may be continually provided to our children and grandchildren. May God give us grace that we may no longer lay up for ourselves treasures on earth, but rather treasures in heaven, where a true reward of grace awaits, rewarded not according to our deeds because of our merit, but rewarded because of the merit of Christ. Let us continue in well doing, for the glory of God shines through the works of the Holy Spirit. Amen.