

The Past That Never Was
Matthew 6:24-34
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The great thing about our faith is that it is always forward looking. We are always striving for a greater future, we are always striving for a greater good, and we should in theory anyway, always be striving for a closer and deeper relationship with God. When Jesus says seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, he is not kidding. That is forward thinking theology. But many of us in life and our faith can be stuck in the past. We tend to worry about the future with a pessimism that things will never be as good as they were. We long for the good ole' days, when everything is simple and everyone was happy.

Perhaps you get these emails sent to you about remember when, sometimes they have pictures with them resembling Ozzie and Harriet, or the Cleavers. But as I was discussing with the Rev. Thom Beagan last month who is the CEO of LOGOS ministries he made a profound comment. These things represent a past that never really was, and trivializes the very real struggles that people faced. We tend to remember what was good in life but forget these images as well.

At root, both pessimism and worry are related to a shortage of hope and trust. Pessimism, which has no confidence that things will work out, can breed despair, and that word literally means “un-hope.” In the Gospel reading where Jesus posed this question, he went on to make clear that what he was calling for instead was for us to trust God. He pointed to the birds that do not sow or reap the fields but are fed by the heavenly Father nonetheless. He pointed to the flowers that do not toil or spin but are clothed in beauty by the heavenly Father anyway.

It's critical to understand, however, that his words were directed to people who *did* have to sow, to reap, to toil and to spin, and he wasn't telling them to stop doing those tasks; he simply wanted them to understand that their lives were a lot more than the sum of their sowing, reaping, toiling, spinning, or the length of their FaceBook profile.

(Slide 5) Further, Jesus tied the call to not worry to the kingdom of God: “But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” That's a significant linkage because God's kingdom is the ultimate reason for optimism and hope. The very meaning of the kingdom is that *God and those who stand with him win*. In the end, good triumphs over evil. If you're a citizen of God's kingdom — and all who follow Jesus faithfully are — it's still possible that you might be pessimistic about human activity in the short

term, but you've got every reason to be optimistic about God's activity in the long term.¹

Jesus knew the minds of his disciples. He set out to challenge that notion of what is good and right, to readjust their priorities to be focused on a future faith. A faith that does not try to recall what never was but seeks a reality of what can yet be. This is a faith that is focused on the coming of the kingdom. The question he leaves is how will we live today, in order to make that kingdom a reality?

When I worked at Greenfield Village, there was always someone who made the comment: "Wouldn't it have been great to have lived back in those days. What a simpler time." Usually I smiled and nodded politely and moved on. However, on occasion I might say, well the past sure is a nice place to visit, but I wouldn't want to live there. They would forget that while they were surrounded by all of these historic buildings and people like us in period clothing so we would look the part, that every building had heat installed in them in the winter, all were wired for electricity, some even had air conditioning. When they were hungry they went to one of our many restaurants and ate food that was prepared in a modern sanitary kitchen. There are even indoor plumbing facilities. It is easy to get sentimental when we don't have to deal with all the aspects of that life.

Jesus reminds us also not to get too sentimental about the past and to not worry about the future. There will be enough trouble in each day of life. But if we have before us the mind of Christ, and the understanding that all we do in our lives even the tough stuff is about the kingdom of God. It is about looking for a tomorrow that will hopefully be better than it is today. It is a tomorrow that will not relive the past, but bring about a better future, where our prejudices are set aside, where there is no more hunger, and rather than worrying about what else we can acquire, we worry about those who don't even have enough. That is seeking the kingdom.

As we go forward in faith let us be real. Let us not trivialize the problems that we have faced and will face. Let us not look to getting back to a past that never was but let us look to a future with hope, future where we seek always the kingdom of God and Gods righteousness not just for ourselves, but for the world to see. Let us use the gifts God has given us to reach beyond our walls and barriers and share the gospel of hope that God has promised for us. In all of these things we are reminded that there is bound to come some trouble, but we may also know that God is with us to paraphrase John Wesley later in his life: even though mountains may rise and oceans may roll to separate us, these attempts are in vain because we are one people called by God, who seek Gods righteousness through Jesus Christ.

¹ Homiletics: *Add to Your Span*. May/June 2007