

Oregon City United Methodist Church
18955 S. South End Road
Oregon City, OR 97045

Rev. Michael Benischek
503-522-9807
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Series: Some Sermons Mike wants to Preach before he leaves!

Sermon: Considering some Lilies

Matthew 6:25-33 (NASB)

For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is life not more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the sky, that they do not sow, nor reap, nor gather crops into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more important than they? 27 And which of you by worrying can add a single day to his life's span? 28 And why are you worried about clothing? Notice how the lilies of the field grow; they do not labor nor do they spin thread for cloth, 29 yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! 31 Do not worry then, saying, 'What are we to eat?' or 'What are we to drink?' or 'What are we to wear for clothing?' 32 For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided to you.

Sermon

When I think about Jesus, I think of him traveling in the small towns and villages, the hillsides and lakeshore. I envision this grand simplicity about the life of Christ. He lived close to nature and loved it. Anyone who grew up in the country would appreciate the fact that Jesus grew up in the country. I grew up in a place of bonfires and coyotes, of bright stars and no traffic. Sweet Baby James out with the cattle. And I picture Jesus in a more rural setting as well. We read his parables in the clustering of the vine, the springing of the corn, the rocking of boats on the lake, and the rising and setting of the sun. Jesus found them in the birds that flew overhead, the sheep of the pastures, the fig trees in the grove, and the fowl in the farmyard. He spent most of his time away from the busy cities of the day. Jerusalem he went to rarely, that had 500,000 people. Everything else was small potatoes. Capernum only had 1,500 folk. Nazareth was smaller than that. He was a small town boy made good.

So much of his teaching was in the imagery of pastoral life. How foreign it must sound to some who live and work in the cities to some of these teachings. We might find ourselves asking, What is it about the lilies Christ wants us to consider?

So this morning, let us take his advice and consider the God of the lilies. When we looked at nature, it does reveal God. The psalmist said, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork" (Psalm 19:1). Who has not gazed at the starry heavens or looked upon the golden sunset and felt near to God? The order, beauty, perfection, and intelligence we see in nature reminds us of God. God speaks in the regularity of the seasons; the movements of the sun, moon, and the stars; the cycles of night and day; and in the balance between humankind's consumption of life-giving oxygen and its production by plant life. Our family watches the waxing and the waning of the moon. During the waxing times, like right now, it is behind the sun slightly slower in rotation than the sun. So tomorrow it will be a little more behind, then more and more until it is 180 degrees away, and then it begins its waning. I love this rhythm, this predictability.

Our generation is fast becoming an urban society. In the mid 1800's, only 20% of the US population lived in the cities. Fast forward 50 years, In 1900, 40% of Americans lived in cities. It doubled. We just watched the

Wizard of Oz recently, written in 1900. You have the scarecrow (farm representation), tin man (urban representation) and lion (military representation). Trying to figure out this new world order and massive change in American life. It didn't slow down. In 1950, we had 60% of us living in the cities. Now its 83%. There's just not as many opportunities back on the farm. The symbolism of the lilies, sparrows, grasses, and vines may not be as relevant to us as it once was. When I went to college, and got off the farm, I went to school. And it was about two weeks when I realized I was missing something. And it hit me - the entire time at school my feet had only touched pavement. No grass. No dirt. Nothing of nature. So I started walking across the grass and made a point of going into the park areas. I'm not against the city at all, just needed balance. Let's contrast Paul and Christ for a moment. You know Paul, wrote much of the New Testament. Paul was not at home in the country. It was the city that appealed to Paul. He thrived on its problems, its pageantry, its bustle, and its crowds. But God was no less real to him. The kingdom of heaven was not like a seed to Paul. The kingdom of heaven was like some noble building. When he illustrated things of grace, he did not turn to the vine or the lily. He turned to the soldier polishing his armor, to the gladiator fighting before ten thousand eyes, to the freeborn citizen whose civic charter had been won in the senate of Imperial Rome. Our God is Lord of all. He is the God not only of the lily but also of the city; not only of the shepherd but also of the astronaut; not only of the Stone age but also of the Space Age. Through faith God is real wherever we live.

But back to the Lily. Let us also consider the growth of the lily. In our text, Jesus said, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin" (Matthew 6:28). What is Jesus saying? He is not saying that the way to grow beautiful, stately, and strong is to be free from all toil and work and tension in life. He is not patting us on the back and saying, "Don't worry. Everything will come out all right." He is not saying that God will step on to correct our follies and omissions. He is not promising a trouble free road. He is not saying to those who trust God that they will never be injured or persecuted. He is not saying that the lilies and the grass will live happily ever after.

But instead, Jesus gives us a parable about life. We too must grow in the valleys of life. Whether we live in the country or in the city, we have problems, sorrows, troubles, pains, and frustrations. What is God trying to say to us here? God is saying, "Don't be anxious about life." The word anxious means "to choke." If you choke, the food won't go up or down. How many of us live all choked up by the problems of our daily existence? Five different times in this passage Jesus tells us not to be anxious. Since God provides for the birds and the flowers and the grass, he will take care of his children, for they are made in his image. Through a life of faith, we can link our feebleness with his strength, our temporariness with his eternity, our emptiness with his fullness, our lack of directions with his purpose.

James Cash Penney (who started J. C. Penney stores) made some unwise commitments and became very depressed. He worried so much that he developed shingles. He went to see his doctor who admitted him to the hospital, but his condition became worse. One night he was prescribed a sedative that quickly wore off, and he awoke believing that he would die that night. He wrote goodbye letters to his family and fell asleep.

He woke up the next morning and was surprised that he was still alive. He heard people singing "God Will Take Care of You" in the chapel and went in. He listened to the singing and message with a heavy heart, but then something happened. He later said, "I realized then that I alone was responsible for my troubles. I knew that God with His love was there to help me." He said that from that day forward his life was free of worry, and it was all because he realized that God would take care of him.

Consider the lilies. We do have our problems today. Racial tension and reckoning are afoot. Protests and marches are seeking change. Change in attitudes. Change in policy. Change in heart. Pastor Mike, do you believe in Cancel Culture? Question I had recently. Do you ascribe to Cancel culture. Of course. We all

should. Maybe not as the media defines it, but I believe that hate should be canceled. Bigotry should be canceled. Sexism should be canceled. Fear should be cancelled. Intolerance should be canceled. I want to cancel attitudes and out-dated beliefs, but I need to remember not to cancel people. Lord knows that I'd be cancelled if we were called to perfection...Jesus called "cancelled" people his friends. In fact, his circle of followers included a betrayer, a thief, and a prostitute, just to name a few. He was unwilling to "cancel" the worst of the worst, the baddest of the bad, and the guiltiest of the guilty. He moved toward those whom society moved away from. He befriended, loved, and touched the outcast, the misfit, the leper, the liar, the sexually deviant. He refused to dismiss those who had been dismissed, reject those who had been rejected, denounce those who had been denounced, and shame those who had been shamed. In fact, his closest friends were of such ill-repute that the religious leaders concluded Jesus must be an imposter because no self-respecting man of God would embrace the kinds of people Jesus embraced.

While our culture (including the church) cancels people who have done terrible things, Jesus cancels the terrible things that people are cancelled for.

What's my message in all of this? Just take a moment and just consider the lilies of the field. They don't toil nor spin, and yet are beautiful. You too, are beautiful. Seek ye first the Kingdom of God. And don't be anxious. Worrying doesn't take away tomorrow's problems, it takes away today's peace. And of course, don't forget to walk through the grass every now and then. That's where you find the lilies. And the family of God said, AMEN!

OPENING: On location at the Wooden Shoe Tulip Farm

CHILDREN'S TIME: Hey kids, thanks for joining us!

Did you know that you can dress up your animals?

We have a few articles of clothing for our guinea pigs. We used to dress up a German Schnouzer in a pilgrim outfit for Thanksgiving. I found these outfits for birds, if you like that kind of thing. I've been told that the pet clothing business is booming right now. Kind of fun. Although we know that God made the animals to be just themselves, they don't need clothes like us.

Jesus told a story about birds once, and flowers for that matter. In this story, Jesus pointed out that even though birds and flowers do not wear clothes, or have houses, they are more pretty and better protected than even rich kings in their fancy robes and big houses.

He told us that our Heavenly Father knows every flower and every bird, and watches over each and every one of them. But He also said that we are much more important to HIM than any bird or any flower, so we should be even more sure that HE will protect us every day.

Sometimes we have a lot of worries. We worry that we won't be okay. Or have enough things to make us safe and happy. In Luke Chapter 12 Jesus said, ...seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Jesus was saying that if we do our best to follow him and keep the commands we don't need to worry about other things. He will always take care of us. No matter what. Our belief that God will always take care of us is called FAITH. Faith means that we believe in Him and we also believe that He is our Father who wants us to be happy.

So feel free and dress your animals if you like - but know that God loves you more than the birds of the air or the flowers of the field. You are beautiful in His sight. Thanks for stopping by!

Prayer:

Kind Father, We thank you that your steadfast love never ceases and that your mercies are new every morning. But so are our worries and our fears and our trepidations - they seem to be new every morning as well - or maybe we just rehash the same old problems we went to bed with last night, only to pick them up when we wake. So today, dear Jesus, we ask for a fresh outpouring of your mercy, and may we begin to understand the depths of your love. May we remember that you have lavished your great love on us, so that we should be called the children of God. That you have asked for our burdens that you might help carry them. As we walk through these turbulent times, let us walk as your children. Let us walk by faith in you and not by sight. As we walk through the depths of our valleys, may you help us reach the mountaintop.

We ask this humbly in the name of Jesus, who taught us how to pray...

Offertory:

Welcome to the Offering, our chance to give back. As United Methodists, we support many ministries, within the church, outside the church, at home and abroad. We are blessed at OCUMC with a wonderful music team. From the band, to our choir and bell choir, worship singers and fearless leader in Rick Wilson, we appreciate the excellence in musicianship for a church our size. This summer, Rick celebrates his 33rd year at Oregon City UMC, beginning down at our old location on Center Street with Wes Taylor as pastor. Over the years, Rick has trained 7 senior pastors so far, and about to have his eighth. We appreciate everything he brings to OCUMC. And while we give him credit, It's your gifts that make music at our church possible. Thank you OCUMC.