

SERMON  
 First Lutheran Church  
 Aitkin, Minnesota

Matthew 6:28-34  
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen  
 November 26, 2017

### **KIDS' MESSAGE – Noisy buckets!**

This week we are talking about **bearing fruit**. Like tomato plants give tomatoes. Like apple trees give apples. Like cucumber plants give cucumbers. **God's people bear fruit too**. **First God's people experience God's wonderful love and care** in their own lives and **then** they **pass God's love and care along** to other people. **Last week** some of you helped to **plant seeds of God's love** in the hearts of the people who came to worship here at First Lutheran. **This week** those seeds of God's love **may be ready to bear some fruit**. Last week we **received God's love**. This week, we have a **special chance** to **share God's love** with others.

I have some little buckets that I would like you to use to go out amongst our faith family and see if anyone has some **loose change** in their pockets. I would like you to see if anybody would like to **share some** of their change to **help some people who are in need**. Whatever gifts of change we gather this morning, we will give to the **Salvation Army in Aitkin to put into their buckets**. Our change will assist the Salvation Army to help **hungry, homeless, sick, hurting people** all the yearlong. Our **little gift given** here **may be a huge help** to someone who **needs a new start in their life**. Enough **gas** for their car to get to a safe place. Some **food** for their table. A **good place** for their family to live. A **toy** for Christmas.

**Last week we planted seeds** of God's love. **Let's see if any fruit** of God's love is **growing this week**. Here are **twelve buckets**. **Jesus started spreading God's love with twelve helpers**. Do you want to help Jesus? Please go out to our faith family and see what happens. (Offering comes back. Blessing is offered. Amen.)

### **ADULT MESSAGE**

Our backyard was a flurry of activity on Thanksgiving morning. After leaving my birdfeeders empty for a few weeks, I refilled them and even added a couple of

new ones. I grew up in a Scandinavian tradition of putting out extra food for the animals at Christmas time. I thought that would be a good idea for Thanksgiving weekend too. I need to be more mindful of feeding the birds year round.

I put up a shiny, new red and green birdfeeder. I filled it with a fruit and nuts mix. I put up some tallow. I even filled the birdfeeder that I allow the squirrels to have easy access to – they eat it all up right away! Since that morning, there has been a steady stream of chickadees, nuthatches, blue jays, crows and squirrels, both red and grey, coming to feast at my feeders. I'm **bearing fruit for the critters**, my contribution to their lives. Those birdfeeders are **my little effort to help critters to survive the cold and storms of approaching winter**. And it **brings me joy to see them gathered and doing well** in my yard.

Somebody far bigger than me has been doing some **rescuing, gathering** and **feeding work** too. Paul speaks of God's work among us, "**He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins**." As Christians, we are members of **God's kingdom, God's family**. **Nothing** the darkness of our world can throw at us will ever be able to **steal us away from God**. We don't deserve anything from God, yet **God gives us everything – life, salvation and all the fruits of the earth**. God has promised to love and care for us in every way. Do you believe that God **created you**? Do you believe that God has **adopted you** into God's precious family? Do you believe that God has **gifted you** with every good person or thing in your life? Do you believe that God is **going to bring you home to heaven** when you leave this world? **Wow, that's a pretty positive view of life.**

Jesus said it. "**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.**" Don't **worry**. **God**

**will take care of you!**” I need to be reminded of that again and again. Who were **“the Gentiles?”** They were the non-Jews who **didn’t know about God’s love and care for them.** They didn’t know God was there for them. They thought they had to **take care of themselves.** They thought they had to **worry.** Jesus wants **you** to **start out each day** with the **realization,** the **firm faith,** that you are a **beloved child of God,** a part of **“the kingdom of God.”** Jesus wants you to **count upon God’s eternal care** for you through the **love/trust relationship,** the **“righteousness”** that God has given you with Jesus.

Here at **First Lutheran Church,** for the past 125 years, and yet today, we have been **servicing up God’s love, compassion, mercy, forgiveness** and **hope** in the **promise and in the flesh of Jesus.** We have been offering these amazing, abundant gifts to an **often hungry and hurting world.** We have been making these gifts available to any and to **all who come here,** and to as many as possible that we can **reach beyond our doors.**

Sometimes while at meetings in our church library, I glance up as people stream in to pick up groceries from the food shelf. Almost all are strangers to me. The same is true at the community meal where I have eaten a few times – almost all unknown to me. Now many of our older community members are playing Pickle Ball here, again, many unfamiliar to me. Our confirmation students have a reputation for bringing their friends here, kids whose families are not involved at First Lutheran. This building is often filled with community folks who come for **public concerts, athletic banquets** or **funerals.** **God uses this building!**

**The Apostle Paul** told the early Christians at **Colossae,** **“In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.”** Paul says this **hope comes from believing the Gospel** news of **God’s great love and mercy** come to us in **Jesus.** Paul says that the **Gospel heard and believed** is **“bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God.”**

One plants. Another waters. But God gives the growth. **How will we use the good fruits** that God has enabled to grow in our own lives and church? How will we share a generous portion of those same fruits of God's love with the people and world around us? **As the blessed recipients of God's amazing love and abundant provisions, how will we bear fruit?** **We aren't talking about survival, but about growth.** We are **talking about abundance, not scarcity.** We are talking **not about worry, but about wonder.** Not, **"I'm worried about whether our congregation will survive next year."** But, **"I wonder how God will continue to move to bring about even greater good amongst and through us in the year ahead."** We are not about the business of **scaring the hell out of people** here. We are in the business of **loving people into the kingdom of God** here and now.

Our **faith isn't about trusting 10% of our income,** or whatever percentage we choose to give away, about entrusting our **"offering" money to God.** Our **faith is about trusting** the **whole 100% of our lives and of our possessions** into God's gracious and loving hands. Our faith is about **trusting God to guide and empower us** in how we use **all that we have** – paying bills, saving, celebrating, recreating, planning for retirement, etc. Our faith is clearly **reflected in us having a heart for being in mission with Jesus** to love and save the world. Our mission work, our **gifts of time, talent and treasure** – these are all our personal **thanksgiving to God!** **Our whole lives can be our thanksgiving to God!"**

Our **125 Years Growing in God's Grace** Anniversary and campaign is about each of us and this faith family **answering God about how we intend to walk with Jesus in mission** during the year ahead. After over five years as your pastor, I am convinced that we have some **golden opportunities** to **grow even richer fruit** to offer in **thanksgiving to God** and in **love and care for this faith family, community and world.** They are:

- **Children, Youth and Family** – This has been a hallmark work of this church for years. But, we can still strengthen and grow our work here tremendously. We hired a wonderful new **Associate Pastor, Jordan Gades.** **He could use more help** if we are to be successful in **strengthening** our Tiny Tots, Vacation Bible School, Sunday school,

- Milestone and Confirmation ministries and in **starting a high school ministry**. We have work to do in **renewing our education wing** to better welcome little ones. We could **reach out more intentionally** to unchurched families. We want to **stand in the face** of the **youth scourges** of **bullying, abuse, drug addiction, meaninglessness,** and **suicide**. **God has given us the power** and the **resources** to **give kids and families hope, help** and even **abundant life** in Christ. **Are we ready?**
- **Senior Ministry** – For older members of this church and community, we could easily start a **rides-to-church program**. We could offer **more daytime** Bible studies and programs. We could help organize a **senior activity center** here. We could **renew our home visitation** program. **Pastor Bob** is retired. I have not been able to even start to cover the shut-in visits he made. Together with our senior members, we have the **ability to do powerful, life-giving work**. **Are we ready?**
  - **Technology** - We have **wonderful equipment** in our offices, sanctuary and fellowship hall. We **broadcast our services** over radio and television. We have a **newsletter, web site** and **face book page**. But we also have the **potential to even better use** every one of these resources.

Next week, we will have the **opportunity to answer God's invitation** to **join with Jesus in mission** to our church, community and world in **2018**. This is the time of year that we conduct our annual stewardship campaign. Someone has said, **"Stewardship is everything we say and do after we say, 'I believe.'"** How you live your God-given life, how you care for family, home, neighbor and creation – **it's all stewardship**. How you partner in mission with Jesus, it's **all your response to our loving and faithful God**. **I wonder what wonderful fruits** God will bring about in **each of our lives** and here in this **faith family** next year? This church is almost like a **giant bird feeder**. And **God delights** in seeing us all **gathered and doing well in God's yard**. Thanks be to God. Amen.

