

Aiming Higher – Matthew 6:25-33

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A son said to his dad one day: “Dad, I’m thinking of going into politics.”

The dad replied, “Are you insane? Have you lost your mind? Are you a moron?”

And the son said, “Forget it, there seem to be too many requirements.”

I think the lighter approach to our politics today, rather than the heavy burden of it, is the better call, especially after an election. Levity can reduce the tension many of us feel and bring us together in the aftermath.

I don’t remember where I heard it, but shortly after the election a few weeks back, I heard a woman on the radio, who I think was some sort of therapist, recommend that people who disagree politically with members of their family should avoid them at the holidays this year by not going to family gatherings as an act of self-care.

Each person can make his or her own decision on that, but it seems really sad that, if you are otherwise inclined to be at that Thanksgiving dinner, you would avoid it based on politics.

I’ll make extreme sacrifices for a great holiday meal. I’ll even sit around a table full of Minnesota Vikings fans in order to have Thanksgiving dinner with all the fixins’. Now, as a Packer fan, is that building a bridge or what?

It just seems as though we all should aim a little higher these days when it comes to what’s ultimately important. In

fact, since this is the season of thanksgiving and celebrating our blessings, it's good to rally around our common identity—such as our common need for being fed.

This is the season of being fed, isn't it?

A couple weeks ago, we gathered as a family in our fellowship hall for our annual thanksgiving and stewardship meal. Oh, it was such good food! The ham, the turkey, the potatoes, dressing, cranberry, spinach maria, and everything else was delicious. We were united in our hunger that day, and we were all fed.

And having nearly 150 people eating together also united our spirits. Days after the election, with some disappointed and some happy with the results, we sat next to each other, ate, and shared in our common identity as children of God.

I hope this upcoming Thanksgiving week will present us with an opportunity to realize just how much we have in common and how much we all are fed. With all the holiday foods that will be present at our dinner tables on Thursday and beyond, it probably won't be hard to realize that our cups runneth over when it comes to having enough food to eat.

This isn't true for all people—and it's certainly not true for even some of our neighbors within miles of where we live. But by and large, all of us here will have opportunities aplenty to sit and eat together this week. And we will rise above that which would divide us.

Beyond the dinner table, I hope we also realize how much we are fed in other ways. I hope we can realize that any insecurity we face about our future challenges—either

individually or collectively — are dwarfed by how much we are being fed by a God who is always the one doing the feeding.

We all become fearful at times, fearful over what might happen. We are fearful that we'll have enough money to live on, fearful over the outcomes of elections, fearful of the threats that our kids or grandkids face every day at school or in the workplace, fearful that the world is one day going to blow up, we're fearful that God's church around the world is dying, fearful that our health is going to break down.

Do you think the disciples were fearful? Sure. When we pick up this story in Matthew 6, we find the disciples just having left everything they knew as familiar and secure to become travelling preachers and teachers like Jesus. They've left their homes, their jobs, and maybe even their families. And they probably didn't agree on all things. Yeah, they were probably fearful.

Jesus had work to do to reassure them of how God would take care of them.

"Look at the birds of the air," he says. "They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"

As God took care of the birds, God would take care of the disciples. As God fed them, so would God feed the disciples with what they needed to not only survive but to be successful in their new calling.

God would be the one to feed them with the assurance they needed.

God feeds us too with a similar assurance that blessing will always trump the threats we face—the fear we have for our security, success, our health, or our safety.

When we fear we won't be fed—either physically, emotionally, or spiritually—we get impatient, and we act in ways that sometimes defy logic. We exhibit behaviors designed to take the feeding out of God's hands.

Symbolically, we attempt to feed ourselves; and when we do, we often find ourselves wasting a lot of energy.

Many of you have dogs at home, and you might be able to relate to this story. It's told by Kari Myers, written in *Home Touch* magazine.

“My little dog has an eccentric habit. It's more of a compulsion really. Whenever we give him a rawhide bone, he spends the rest of the day and sometimes the next in a flurry of activity. Whether he is motivated by instinct or his own peculiar quirkiness or some combination of the two is hard to say.

“Given a bone, he commences a search through the house for a suitable place to bury it. Once he settles on a spot, he proceeds to ‘dig’ a hole in the linoleum. Undaunted by the fact that all his furious digging scarcely leaves a scuff on the floor, he carefully places his bone in his imaginary hole. Next, he painstakingly noses imaginary dirt over it and then turns himself around to kick some more for good measure. This whole exercise in futility can take a quarter of an hour.

“It is at this point, when he inspects his work, that he appears to realize something is amiss. His prize is not sufficiently buried and, in fact, is in plain sight. So, he picks

it back up and hunts for a better spot. And thus, the cycle repeats over and over again until it's time for a nap.

"Sometimes," Kari Myers writes, "as I watch him and shake my head, I wonder if there is some of this craziness in me, too. Are there things I do over and over out of a compulsion I do not understand — things that are equally unproductive? Maybe you know what I mean. Things like wearing ourselves out trying to impress other people. Or how about chasing after things that never satisfy. Or maybe it's just a cycle of busyness that doesn't really get us anywhere. Sometimes I wonder...but then it's time for a nap."

What her dog did, and what we often do similarly reflects our desire to feed ourselves when we don't sense God is doing any of the feeding. We take matters into our own hands in ways that only prove futile in our quest to find what truly nourishes us.

We should aim higher.

During this week and season of Thanksgiving, it is good for us to remember that we are fed not only by the hands of those who prepare us our Thanksgiving dinner, but by the hand of God who feeds our souls and our spirits with the assurance that we are in good hands.

I came across a C.S Lewis quote this week that resonated. Lewis said, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen; not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else."

Our faith—our unique faith in the God who is Jesus—allows us to see more. It allows us to see above what scares us. It allows us to see how it is that God provides for us in

our fear, how God feeds us when we can't feed ourselves in troubled times. If we live in a very messy and divided world, which we do, it would do us well to have a set of beliefs that will be robust enough and complex enough to bear the weight of this messy world, to rise above the fray.

Those beliefs reinforce that we need not fear; we need not be anxious; we need not waste our energy in matters that would attempt to accomplish what only God can do. This is what our faith does. It shifts the burden from self-reliance to that of God-reliance.

When we, "Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness," we aim higher for that which is more important than political victories or petty one-upmanship. God will then feed us in ways that can unite.

Go to your holiday gatherings this week and aim higher than that which we disagree about. Seek first the kingdom of God and God's righteousness.