

Matthew 6:33

There seem to be some similarities between Ascension Day and Confirmation Day. They both come around at this time of the year, and church members are not really aware of either of them. How many of you paused last Thursday to remember, "Oh yes, today is Ascension Day, the day Jesus ascended into heaven?" Quite possibly, many of us would not have ever given it a thought except that it's being mentioned this morning here in church. And by the same token, there are probably members who came to church this morning not realizing that today is Confirmation Day, except that they saw it in the bulletin.

Both Ascension Day and Confirmation Day take place on schedule in the church calendar. Ascension Day is always forty days after Easter, and young Lutheran men and women are confirmed, on schedule, as they complete their eighth-grade year at school, whether they are ready to be confirmed or not. And hopefully most, and even all, are ready. Jesus taught His disciples many things before He ascended, and all young confirmands are taught the living words of Christ before they are confirmed so that they are ready.

There is one similarity between Ascension Day and Confirmation Day which is not a good thing, but sadly which is quite common in Lutheran churches. After Jesus ascended into heaven, His disciples did not see Him anymore with their eyes. And after young men and women are confirmed, many of them are not seen in church anymore by those who worship regularly. May this not be true of you, Zach; but may God in His grace keep you faithful to Him even unto death.

Today we will look at your confirmation verse, the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:33: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

When you're in school, if the teacher tells you to "Sit up straight!"..."Pay attention!"... Stop talking!"...it means that you are not already doing these things. A teacher would never tell a student to stop talking if that student was quietly listening. And so when Jesus tells us, "Seek first the kingdom of God," this implies that you and I are not, at present time, doing this. We're seeking everything else under the sun—not necessarily bad things; things which are, in and of themselves, wrong and wicked—but food, clothing, shelter...the basic necessities of life. These are the things Jesus discusses before verse 33. "All these things the Gentiles seek," He says. He is not saying that the Gentiles, (those who are not God's people) seek wicked and perverse things in life. Many of them are fine, upstanding, moral folks. They just don't seek God. They do not seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. But you would think that a Christian would. A baptized child of God who has been taught the love of Jesus and the absolute importance of what Jesus gives us in His living words—you would think that person would seek things which are different from what a Gentile, a non-Christian, seeks.

Yet, what does Romans 3 say? "There is none who understands; there is none who seeks for God." Why not? Why do the Gentiles seek everything but God? And why do Christians such as we, do what the Gentiles do and seek, not God's kingdom and righteousness first, but everything else in life?

Have you ever had a stubborn, disobedient animal for a pet? You tell it to get off the road, and it stands there and just looks at you. You tell it, "Come here," and it walks in the other direction. Sometimes you wonder why you even care. It will seek what it wants, when it wants, no matter what you say or do. And that's us! By nature we seek what we want. You place a big piece of cake and a small piece of cake next to a child and just watch him, every single time, go for the big piece of cake. It's our nature. We don't want, by nature, what's best for us. We want and seek what we want to do, what we want to watch, what we want to eat, where we want to go. "You can either study your catechism," says mom, "or you can go see a movie with your friends." Which one will her child seek? "You can go to church, or you can sleep in...or go hunting." Which will the child choose? Which will the adult choose? "No one seeks for God," says the apostle, everyone seeks to do what he or she wants to do.

Now Jesus is not saying here in Matthew 6:33 that we can't seek anything else in life except Him. He says, "Seek ye first." He wants farmers, and carpenters, and workers of all kinds to seek to work hard and provide for their families, but not on Sunday mornings. When God's Word is being preached and taught, we are to seek that first. He wants those who prepare meals in the kitchen to work hard for their families in this way, but not when it prevents them from being in the House of God. The family dinner can wait. First we must seek His meal of grace—His body and blood for us.

And you will not suffer for doing this. God will not withhold His temporal blessings from you as you seek first His kingdom and righteousness. "All these things shall be added unto you," He promises. Taking time out for church will not hurt you financially. He will take care of you as you seek His Word and Supper. It is not time wasted. It is not time which could have been spent making money. Taking time out for devotions with the family and for the private study of Scripture will not prevent God from giving you everything you need for this life, and it will especially give you what you need for the life to come.

But why am I even saying all of this? Our sinful nature doesn't want to listen. When Jesus says, "Come here," we want to walk in the other direction. "Seek ye first?" "Maybe later; right now I'll seek what I want, when I want."

Is anyone even listening to these words of Matthew 6:33? Yes, Jesus is. These words tell us that He is first and foremost seeking you. When Satan tempted Him with all the glory of the kingdoms of this earth, He said, "Begone Satan!" because He desired only to suffer and die for you. When Peter told Jesus to avoid the path to the cross, Jesus said, "Get behind Me, Satan!" because He was seeking to win for you a place in heaven with Him.

Even though you and I may want to walk the other way when we hear the words, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God," it is through these very words of Christ that He seeks you. Jesus doesn't seek you because you are seeking Him. He seeks you because we're off wandering away from Him seeking everything else but Him. He seeks you because He took your sins to His cross and there He died for you. He seeks you because He rose again on the third day for you. He seeks you because your Father in heaven has declared you forgiven for Jesus' sake.

You're not going to find God by seeking Him, but as you seek, He finds you. God's kingdom is here where His true living words are heard. His righteousness is here where

Christ is given for you in water and word, bread and wine. Even though our flesh would rather be somewhere else, God brings us to these holy things and here He seeks us for His own possession. Why? So He, in Word and Sacrament, can give you eternal life with Him. You tell a dog to "Come here," because you want to feed it and care for it. Jesus says, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness," for the same reason—because it is here that He cares for you; it is here where He gives you eternal blessings—the crown of life which is yours in Christ Jesus alone. If you understand these words, "Seek ye first," not as a harsh command, but as a gracious invitation, then you are blessed—and then you will come when your Savior calls because you desire the life and salvation which He gives to you.

These words may be your confirmation verse, Zach, but they are for all of us. Each one of us has the same living Lord. Each one of us has the same merciful Savior. His call, "Seek ye first," is placed into each and every one of our ears this day. He desires none to be lost. He wants all to be saved. If you have not been seeking first God's kingdom, then hear this—He is still seeking you. He will not give up on you. He loves you. He died for you. He forgives you. Do not turn away from His call. It is a kind word of invitation. It is the call of grace. Every time His Word is preached and taught here, He calls you to seek His Word first. Zach, He will help you to do this. Trust Him. Amen.