



# ST. MARK'S ON THE CAMPUS

## Episcopal Church & Student Center

1309 R Street \* Lincoln, NE 68508 \* (402) 474-1979 \* [www.stmarks-episcopal.org](http://www.stmarks-episcopal.org)

The Rev. Jerrold Thompson  
Sermon for Second Pentecost  
St. Mark's on the Campus  
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**“NO ONE CAN SERVE TWO MASTERS. . . .you cannot serve both God and wealth. “Strive first for God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness, and all these things” – all these things you worry about so much – they “will be given to you as well.” (Matthew 7:21-29) “Strive first for God’s kingdom.”**

Someone once described to me a relative she had as “being on the fast track”; he was running a family business that consumed enormous amounts of his time, leaving very little time for his family or for nurturing his own soul or for serving others in a very deliberate way. Was he striving for God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness? I have no idea. I also once knew of a congregation which had so much money that its rector challenged them to set aside a million dollars each year for the purpose of outreach. And they did it! Was that a sign of that congregation’s striving for God’s kingdom? Maybe.

How do we evaluate such things in others when we ourselves know how layered our own motivations are? Indeed, how do we evaluate our own striving? Or is the attempt to make such a judgment simply one more way to chase after a false God whom we cannot serve at the same time we serve the only true God? A *striving* after proof of our own righteousness that in the end deters us from striving for God’s kingdom, that moves our attention away from God and onto ourselves.

In our psalm for today, the psalmist says, “I still my soul and make it quiet, like a child upon its mother’s breast.” Have you ever known a nursing mom? When our kids were small, we supported nursing on demand; in other words, when they wanted to nurse -- whether for nourishment or for comfort -- Carol was available the vast majority of the time. We believed it was best for our family and we were able to do it, which we fully recognize not everyone can. I was available too, sometimes, but when it came to nursing, the kids were never quite as taken with me as they were with Carol.

That kind of availability is a wonderful image for God’s availability to us, that God is available to us for nourishment and for comfort , to build up our souls in order to serve God “joyfully . . . in confidence and in serenity,” as we said a few minutes ago in our collect for today. Knowing that in the midst of our service we can turn to God to draw on the milk of God, that we can turn in confidence and in serenity, to be strengthened and nourished and comforted into a deeper striving for God’s kingdom – not judged for our failure in the past – that’s a part of the gift of the good news.

There's a similar image in the passage from the book of Isaiah we read today, in which the Lord says: "Can a woman *forget* her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb?" Of course the answer to the rhetorical question is no, never would a mother forget her child! God then goes on to say: "Even these may forget, yet I will not forget."

The passage ends with a line that is incredibly moving when placed alongside the wounds of Christ: "See," says God, "I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands." What loving parent – indeed what loving *person* doesn't know something of the wounds we share with those in pain as that pain becomes inscribed within *us*? "Strive first for God's kingdom and God's righteousness."

The Vestry has decided that the next step in some post retreat work will be to look at our congregation's mission statement. Just in case you don't have the current mission statement memorized, it begins, "St. Mark's on the Campus strives . . . ." I couldn't help but think of those first words of the mission statement as I prepared for this morning. And then I thought about what each of our personal mission statements might be were we to write them. We might start them the same way: "Jerry Thompson strives . . . . Bob Kuzelka strives . . . Nan Graf strives . . . Helen Pitts strives . . . Andrea Nelson strives . . . ."

How are we striving as individuals and as a congregation – how are we striving first for God's kingdom? How are we, like Jesus, inscribing the pain of the world on the palms of our hands in order that those hands – infused as they are with the Spirit of God – might help to bring healing? And how might we be protecting our hands a bit too much, not trusting quite enough in the one whose kingdom we serve?

I'm not sure there are ever crystal clear answers to those questions, answers that we can rely on completely for assurance about our own righteousness before God. After all, being accepted as righteous is God's *gift* to us, not something we can ever be sure of because of what we've done or haven't done. But we can strive to serve in confidence and serenity, trusting in the God who never forgets us, the God who is always there for us, when we turn for comfort and when we extend our hands for nourishment.

For if our desire is to serve, God will feed us for the purpose.