

Faith in the Face of Fear

Luke 12:32-40

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“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

“Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.

“But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Fear. Fear seems to follow us around these days. We hear stories of nuclear powers being tested and threatened. We know the days are numbered that we can do anything to stem the tide of climate change. We see the devastation of white

supremacy and mass shootings. Our days are filled with fear and those with power and influence try and play up this fear. Fear of immigrants. Fear of muslims. Fear of not having enough. Fear of not being right. Fear of saying the wrong thing.

And fear is powerful. It has the power to motivate people, the power to keep people stagnant, the power to bring out the worst in us. Fear has become a part of our daily lives. Turn on the tv or the radio or look on Facebook, fear. Go for a walk outside and see homeless people begging for food or houses where multiple families live because the minimum wage will not support them, fear. Have a talk with your work colleagues or your friends and inevitably the questions of “What the hell are we going to do?” come up, fear.

And we come to church and hear these words, “Sell your possessions, and give alms.” “Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit...” “You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.” And I do not know about you, but these words that Jesus speak cause even more fear to well up in me. “How do I give more money when I am barely making it?” “How can I always be on alert for God coming? What if I miss it or fall asleep or glance down for too long?” Fear. This fear has so permeated my body and my mind and my soul that I read Jesus’ words and feel fear. It has sunk deep into our psyche so that every interaction becomes tinged with it, fear...

But that is not why Jesus is saying these things. In fact, Jesus is saying the very opposite. In the first line from our text today, Jesus says, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Do not be afraid, little ones. God is giving you the kingdom. Do not be afraid my dear children, I am God and I want to give you all the gifts and power and wonder and hope of my kingdom.

This whole chapter, the 12th chapter of Luke's gospel, has been devoted to overcoming our fears and not letting them become a burden on our soul. Maybe we are afraid that God does not care for me or for our world today? Jesus says, "God knows the number of hairs on your head. God is paying attention to you." Maybe we are afraid to talk about our faith or the love that Jesus has given, wondering what others will think about us. Jesus says, "The Holy Spirit will help you know what to say. Even when it feels scary, God is with you." Maybe we are afraid that if we do not accumulate enough wealth that we will not be safe or that we will not be able to provide for our families. Jesus says, "Money will not always be with you, but God will always, always be there for you." Jesus is responding to the many fears that we carry around with us, both then and now.

Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sweetly and tenderly, Jesus gives us the hope we need to stand up in the face of fear and gives us confidence in God so that we can go out and be courageous.

Jesus' eyes are set on Jerusalem, knowing that he is heading to his crucifixion, but also knowing that God is bigger than life or death, knowing that our God is one of resurrection and redemption, knowing that in the sacrifice God will use that moment to transform lives and cultures and the world.

This is not something we earn, by giving the most money or doing the most good deeds, but something that God has given us freely. The tense of the verb "to give" in Greek suggests that God has already given us the kingdom. This is not a futuristic pipe dream but a real, lived-in, concrete kingdom. This is somewhere we can live in right now. And we do not have to move to a different city. We do not

have earned it, through good works or anything else. God's kingdom is here and inviting us to participate. How do we participate?

For me when wondering how to participate in God's loving kingdom, I often look to the prayer of St Francis:

Where there is hatred let me sow love

Where there is injury, pardon

Where there is doubt, faith

Where there is despair, hope

Where there is darkness, light

And where there is sadness, joy.

And as we sow these seeds of hope, rooted in God's love for us, the fear in ourselves will begin to wash away and become easier to face. As we lean into the love of God through Jesus Christ, we know that we have been given the kingdom to live into. As we experience God's tangible kingdom through acts of service, through community, through worship, we begin to let go of fear's control over us, bit by bit. And over time, as we learn to trust the goodness of our God, the fear will begin to leave our body, our mind, and our soul and we will once again be able to turn to our neighbor in love instead of fear, sharing alms with those in need, and waiting patiently for our God.

Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Amen.