

Isaiah 1:1, 10-20  
Psalm 50:1-8, 23-24  
Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16  
Luke 12:32-40

Anybody here ever binge watch multiple episodes of a TV series on Netflix or HBO or other cable channels? They always start out the same way....”Previously on ‘The Crown’” or ‘The Sopranos’ or ‘Cheers’ or whatever it is you’re watching.....and then we get a short synopsis of the last episode before we dive into the current one. It provides us some continuity so we don’t lose the thread of the story from one episode to the next. Maybe sermons should start out the same way. Previously, in the gospel of Luke, we heard the parable of the rich fool. Continuity is important because there is a thread that connects all these passages and there is an over-arching message that we want to be sure we don’t miss while we are zeroing in on the current one. Scripture passages are connected.

Where a piece of Scripture fits in with other passages of scripture always helps us figure out the over-arching message. In this case, between the scripture we heard last week about the rich fool, there are eleven verses of Jesus telling us not to be afraid and not to worry. Life is more than food and the body more than clothing. And, he asks, who among you can add a single hour to your life by worrying? These eleven verses reassure us that God knows what we need and if God takes care of the birds of the air and clothes the grass that is here today and gone tomorrow, how much more will our Heavenly Father look after us? Our gospel lesson for this morning picks up where that section of the Gospel of Luke ends and we hear Jesus saying:

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom of heaven.”

Do not be afraid! Can’t you just hear someone saying to Jesus, “Easy for you to say, Jesus.” Have you looked around lately? We’re occupied by the Romans. You did notice that, didn’t you, Jesus? There’s crime everywhere. Taxes are high. We have a hard time gathering together enough food for our families let alone clothing. And you’re telling us not to worry?

We can relate, can’t we? There’s plenty for us to worry about, too. Shoppers at WalMart in El Paso didn’t make it home because an active shooter showed up. And the people enjoying a Saturday night out in Dayton, Ohio at a trendy section of town filled with clubs and restaurants never made it home either. We’re trying to figure out how to pay our bills at the end of the month and school will be starting soon. Will our children be all right? Will they make friends? Will they work hard? Will they behave themselves? There’s a lot to worry about! And if we

don't have enough on our own plate to worry about, all we need to do is turn on the 24-hour news cycle and we can be updated on all the events that have disrupted lives all around the world. Not worry? Are you kidding? We're tempted to say, "I'm sorry, Jesus, but I just can't get on board with this!"

And then we can imagine Jesus answering them...and us. Don't you know that I am on my way to Jerusalem? I know all too well what my fate will be there. And many of you who follow me will have the same fate. I know what lies ahead and I know what lies beyond that.

So what does Jesus mean when he says, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."? He's talking about God's provision for us as a gift, not something that we earn. It's a comforting message. God takes pleasure in providing for us and giving us the kingdom. Last week we heard Jesus telling us that we need to be rich toward God. This week we hear that God is already waiting to give us more than we can imagine...not in material goods that God knows we need anyway, but in things that do not wear out; things that cannot be stolen from us; things that moths cannot eat and destroy.

Jesus is telling us to pay attention to God. There is a lot to worry about...for us as individuals and for our congregation as a whole. We worry about whether or not we will survive. We worry about whether or not more people will come to join us. We worry about whether or not we are doing what God wants us to be doing in this community where we live and move and have our being. We worry about what's going to happen to us. We worry about how all of this will unfold. In short, we worry about us and our future.

And Jesus is clearly saying to us, "Don't." And yet as human beings, we are hardwired to fret and worry. Once again, Jesus is asking us to go against the grain...to do something or to behave in a way that simply goes against our human nature. But consider this scenario...

There are two Moms who each have a teenage son who is old enough to drive. Each of the sons asks his Mom for keys to the family car so he can go out with his friends on Saturday night. Both Moms give their sons the car keys along with a long list of do's and don'ts. When Saturday comes, they each pull the family car out of the driveway. The Moms wave good-bye and each one goes in her house. What the Moms do inside their respective houses is different. One Mom paces back and forth; she wanders from room to room; she looks out the window for her son's return. She thinks of all the possible things that could happen to him...none of them good! She is visibly relieved when her son comes walking through the door at the end of the evening. Now the other Mom pops some popcorn and settles down with a huge bowl full to watch a movie she's been wanting to see on Netflix. She has a long phone conversation with an old friend she hasn't seen for a while and she spends a bit of time beating her husband at gin rummy. She's happy to see her son come through the door at the end of the evening and wants to know if

he's had a good time. Two different ways to spend a very similar evening. The point is that there's no connection between how the mothers spent their evening and whether or not their sons came home safe. None whatsoever. Worry accomplishes nothing! The outcome was the same for both of these mothers. The difference is, one was able to enjoy the evening she had and the other gave the evening over to worry and distress. She allowed her anxiety to ruin what could have been a lovely evening for her. The present moment is all the time that any of us has. Don't spoil it by giving it over to worry!

Jesus wants to get down to the root of what is within us that causes us to worry. Jesus wants to get inside us. And when we pray, we allow him in. And when we come to the rail and take Holy Eucharist, we ingest him. We allow him in. He has the strength to do things with us and for us that we are unable to do for ourselves. He has the power to help us set aside our worries and enjoy each moment that we have. All we have to do is ask.

Most importantly of all, Jesus wants us to trust God. Do not be afraid, little flock for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Do we believe that or not? Are those just words or is that an idea that we will ponder and take in and inwardly digest so that it becomes a part of us? God is real, you know! And we have to trust him. We have to trust God with the most important aspects of our lives and those are not 'things.' The purses that do not wear out are the relationships that we make here on earth...the connections that we build and nurture. That love between us and other human beings is the unfailing treasure in heaven where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.

When Jesus tells his listeners to be prepared...to be dressed for action...he knows that no one can keep a perpetual vigil. But an awareness of God can permeate our thoughts on a regular basis as we go about our daily tasks. We can think about God. We can talk about God. We can pray to God for what we need or simply to share ourselves with God. We can look for God in all that happens around us. Some people can see God all over the place in their daily lives and in the lives of the people they know. It's as if we were weaving the golden thread of God throughout the fabric of our daily lives. When we cultivate it, an awareness of God is as natural as breathing in and breathing out. When we are consciously aware of God in our daily lives we are preparing ourselves for the surprise of the kingdom coming here and being given to us. And we will be ready for that. It doesn't matter that the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour. He's already with us 24/7/365. And we're ready to greet him face to face.

Thanks be to God.  
AMEN.