



FEAR NOT LITTLE FLOCK

Luke 12: 32 – 40 August 8, 2010

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“Fear not, little flock. It is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

Are you fearful? There is much to fear in our world today. We could make a long list of things to fear. Terrorism; war; the economy; global warming, unemployment, hunger, poverty, homelessness, disease, the oil spill in the Gulf; drug and alcohol addiction of our young. Fear not, little flock. It is impossible to escape what is around us – walk in the neighborhood, drive on the interstate – you see neighborhood watch signs. If you decide to just stay home, then don’t watch newscasts. The bad news crawl at the bottom of the TV set and information updates flash in our web browsers. We are told we are doomed if we do not buy the right products immediately.

Into this increasing threatening world, Jesus offers us extraordinary words of comfort. “Do not be afraid, little flock. It is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” To me those words are not just a whistling in the dark. They remind us that the fears attendant upon earthly need do not have the last word in defining our life. What defines our life? It is our treasure we have in God’s love and care. Sometimes our uncertainty about the future causes us to think about disregarding the needs of others and to stash our possessions in a spirit of greediness. But at the end of the day, we can’t take that stuff with us. Are we worried about our life, our food and clothing – in our day about organic produce, designer shirts, stylish cars, a fat bank account – those things that tell the world about us the “we have it made,” Anxious about food and clothing, about life and death – this worrying will not make a difference. I think that statement about God caring for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field are not statements of some idyllic sort of life. They point us to the brevity of life.

Don’t be afraid little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom. This God is not a God who created the universe and just sits back and watches it all unfold. This God is a God who attends to sparrows, ravens, lilies.



God's care extends to knowing the hairs on our heads and it is God's pleasure to give to us the Kingdom.

God's good pleasure. Let's think about that for a moment.

This good pleasure was expressed at the birth of Jesus. Remember the words to the fearful shepherds. "Do not be afraid. Behold, we bring you good news, GOOD NEWS of great joy. For to you is born this day in the City of David, a savior, who is Christ the lord." That good pleasure was announced again at the baptism of Jesus – "You are my son, my beloved, in whom I am well pleased. Jesus told Simon Peter and the disciples, "Do not be afraid."

This Greek word expressing God's good pleasure stands in the aorist tense – which indicates action completed in the past. In other words, God's decision to bless us has already taken place. We seek God's kingdom because God has already decided to give it to us.

It is important for us to understand this passage in terms of the parousia – the end time. Luke and the early church thought Jesus was coming back any day and it would be all over. But "Kingdom" does not simply mean eternal life in the sweet by and by. Here, Kingdom is referring to God's bringing the Kingdom on earth through the ministry of Jesus. It is not a place – like a country – rather it involves God's lordship over human hearts, minds, values and actions. We are transformed members of this Kingdom of God. Kingdom is present and it is coming. This little flock – and we – will belong to that kingdom. Very soon, the early church identified the core of this coming new order as the church. But the church is not really a good definition of living in the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God transcends any human community – including the church. This Kingdom is a gift.

The text does talk about being ready – for we do not know when the Kingdom will appear in our lives. We do not always recognize the Kingdom in the kindness, the generosity, the care of others. The being ready is not to avoid punishment, but being ready to receive the blessing of God.

We don't exactly know what to do with this "sell your possessions and give alms. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." If you think the end of time is upon you, it would be easier to sell all your possessions. I don't think the



emphasis here is to be irresponsible about the future. This end of time that is upon us has turned into a long wait, hasn't it?

I do think what we give has a great deal to do with where our treasure is – where our heart is. I think of the creative people who have been and are among us – the composers, artist, authors, mathematicians, scientists, teachers – their work does not “just happen.” Their work comes from carefully disciplined awareness over time. These people were prepared. They were ready for the moments of new, fresh insights. It is true in our lives. What knock at the door brings the bearer of God's good pleasure? What act of generosity frees us to peek through the door of heaven? What small steps we take as a congregation build confidence in God's good pleasure working in us?

When all is said and done, this gift of the Kingdom may well point to our giving. You know what I remember about the tragedy of 9/11? It was the people, the communities, spontaneously and generously responding. In New York, there was this great outpouring of giving. People showed up at the site with clothes, food, toothpaste, toiletries, flowers. So many came to donate blood that the Red Cross had to turn people away. To me this huge response of giving is a picture of us at our very best. There seems to be something in our very nature that when we are at our best, it causes us to contribute, to create, to attempt to make something out of our mess.

When are we at our best at worship? It is not when the minister preaches a good sermon. It is not is our spirited singing. Nor is in our prayers we offer in prayers for the people. I think we are at our best during the offering. I think that is what this “Where your treasure is” stuff is all about. Watch us, during the offering, and you will see us at our best. It does not have to be a lot of money, it does not have to be money we offer at all. Sometimes what we are offering is ourselves. What we are doing, in our offering, is transforming whatever we do for a living into an offering to God. In doing so, I think our daily work is redeemed. When we say, “Let us give of ourselves and gifts to the work of God” we are affirming what we do every day is sacred, is holy, is a part of our work in the Kingdom of God. “Fear not, little flock. It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.”