

## **Luke 12:32-40**

In today's gospel lesson, there is an extraordinary promise.

### **Did you catch it?**

In Luke's gospel, Jesus said to his disciples, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom". This means we need not be afraid, as we know that our God is giving us his unperishable kingdom.

We got a glimpse of the greatness of God's promises in our reading about Abram and Saria this morning. God makes an outlandish promise to this barren couple saying, "do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." And God promised that Abram's descendants would number as many as the stars in the night sky above Hebron.

### **Have you taken the time to lie down and look at the stars lately? What happens when you get lost in the stars?**

Now, Abram was already 75 - definitely past prime child bearing age. And this promise was not fulfilled instantly. It was another 25 years before Isaac was born. Abram was of the ripe old age of 100, when Sarai, his wife, gave birth at 90. The story emphasizes their faithfulness in following God in the present times.

The life of faith to which Jesus calls his disciples and indeed, calls us to, is both simple and hard.

### **For you, what's the simple part? What's the hard part?**

Stanley Hauerwas, an American theologian argues that faith is a virtue, and like all virtues, it must be practiced in order to be effective. That is, faith must be active, persistently exercised in the here and now, to be real.

As we look around, we can see that we live in a horribly sick world. Today, there is still great sickness among people with the ongoing pandemic. There is the sickness of the earth, as we continue to deplete its resources and it cannot maintain the old patterns that have sustained our lives. Our societies are sick, unable to alleviate our inequalities or our economies.

Despite massive advances in knowledge and technology, we find ourselves powerless to address these sicknesses. Helpless, we spiral into an abyss of anxiety, depression and violence. There is so much to fear. Every single one of us is affected by these things, and we all show symptoms in our bodies, minds and souls.

### **What do you see as the root of these problems - our minds, our physical bodies, or our spirits?**

If you look closely, you will see that these are actually spiritual problems, which affect our bodies and our thinking. It probably explains why contemporary politics seems to

have less and less ability to tackle these problems. It seems that wannabe leaders generate a lot more support by fueling hostility and promising to put up walls to keep out the poor, the refugees, the orphaned, and the traumatized.

But keep in mind, this is not a new situation. Like us, Jesus' earliest followers lived in a world where the Kingdom of God was forcefully advancing, and where at every turn violence threatened to bear that kingdom away. How difficult it would have been for those first disciples to believe what Jesus was telling them about God giving them the kingdom.

### **What things are you afraid of?**

In the midst of all this, Jesus's words offer an extraordinary word of comfort in this threatening world: "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." These fears we have are not the last word. What we see is not the last word. Our God is gracious and sovereign. What God offers us does not have to be purchased with our money or our good deeds.

### **What happens in this passage after the promise is given?**

Jesus asks us to sell our possessions, helping those who are poor. He says to be dressed, watching and waiting for his return. As you read on in this passage, it may seem like instructions and commands to follow leading to the end times.

Yet this passage it is not so much about the end times, but the end ways. The message is to be ready so that you may receive the fullness of God's blessing right now. Receiving is a key word here. God is offering us his kingdom.

### **God offers the gift. What is our part?**

A gift that is not opened and put to use is useless. Jesus is challenging his followers to put their faith into practice in a straightforward way. We do this by selling our possessions so that we can share generously to the poor. We do this by living in the kingdom right now, not putting it off until some unknown future time.

### **How can we shift our perspective to see this as a promise, not a threat?**

This is not a God who, after creating the universe, sits back and calmly watches it all unfold. Our God is a God who attends to sparrows, ravens, and lilies, a God whose concern for humankind extends so far that she desires to give us her kingdom.

Our own human means for protecting against these problems cannot compare with God's powerful means of dealing with creation. God is intimately concerned and involved our lives and the lives of each thing she has created.

The response that God is looking for runs counter to our natural response of clinging to our possessions and protecting them as insurance against hard times. The attitude of scarcity teaches us that giving away our things leads to destitution and deprivation. On

the other hand, the attitude of abundance taught by Jesus, teaches that giving leads us into the kingdom, not only in the future, but here and now.

This chapter of Luke is filled with reminders not to worry, that serve as an antidote to human fear of an unknown future. God knows each sparrow, and you are more valuable to God than the sparrow. . . The Spirit will give you the right words to say in each difficult situation. . . Do not worry over what to eat or what clothes to wear for the body is more than clothes and food. . . The only thing of importance is striving for the kingdom of God.

### **How do we apply this to our lives?**

The test is: how do we live our lives - Taking or giving? This question reveals the truth of our hearts. It is in giving that we open ourselves to both practice in giving and receiving God's mighty blessings.

The message here is not a threat to us, like the message we hear in our culture about being afraid. This message is about how to be ready so that we will receive God's blessings now.

"Do not be afraid, little flock," he says, "it is your Father's good pleasure to give you all things." And from that astounding promise comes the invitation, rather than a command, to prioritize, to share, and to be prepared for what comes.

It means putting one foot in front of the other in a faithful quest to find the pathway of life and love right here and right now. It means beginning to practice the culture of love and mercy and radical hospitality right now, today.

We have Jesus' promise that it is God's good pleasure and heart's desire to give us all good things. God wants us to have his presence. God invites us to live as Jesus lived.

My grandson, Sullivan has been here with us this week. We must have spent an hour sitting in the creek, skipping stones the other day. He asked me, 'Do you know the most important part to being able to skip stones?' Then he told me, 'You just have to believe that you can do it and practice a little.'

I think we could use that same advice to summarize our reading today. You just have to believe that God wants to give us his kingdom and then practice living in it a little.

And then:

Instead of hoarding money, we can give it away. Instead of worrying about ourselves, we can care for others. Instead of calculating every contingency, we can sit back and enjoy the beauty of the morning birdsong and the glory in a field of flowers.

And with the knowledge of God's promise and a little practice, God can enable us to do things we have never dreamed we could do!

Luke 12:23 theological Feasting on the word

Isaiah <https://www.ekklesiaproject.org/lectionary/blog/2019/08/crisis-of-faith>