

Heart Finder

Read Luke 12:32-40

Before we get into the text for this morning we need to look in the rear view mirror at the verses that precede it. In the previous section we hear Jesus instructing his disciples with the words “do not worry about your life.” That’s easier said than done! I wonder if worry was a grain like wheat or oats that you or I have been stowing away during our lives how many large sacks would we fill. Would there be a barn big enough to hold that large a load? If we are honest we’ve spent loads of time worrying about what we will eat and what we will wear, acting like Gentiles that don’t know a thing about God.

When you get down to it worry is the legal tender of our practical atheism. We fret and strive to do what we call making a living as though we can actually make a decent living apart from the generosity and largesse offered to us for free by the God who loves us. We work feverishly from Monday to Saturday, and then throw God a sop of one hour on Sunday in the name of religion.

If all the investment God gets from us is one hour and a few dollars in the offering plate, is it any wonder that we are beset with worry almost all the time? How unlike the birds of the air and the lilies of the field we all are. To one who has not learned the art of living in a relationship of trust with God, Jesus’ advice is one of two things. It is either consigned to the category of naïve and wide-eyed idealism or it is a radical and yes frightening call to a whole different way of life.

That’s why our text this morning begins with these words: “Fear not little flock.” Perhaps nothing stokes our inner fears like the invitation to trust a God whom we cannot see in the face of a thousand real needs that we can see and somehow have to pay for. Jesus knows well that life here is not easy, that we all face enormous challenges in life, and that we often feel simply inadequate to measure up. That’s why he calls the disciples and us by extension “little flock.” He’s saying quite tenderly, “I see you. I know you feel small sometimes. I know you often experience the helplessness like sheep that must rely upon a shepherd

to guide you, feed you, and protect you. Fear not little flock; I am the Good Shepherd.”

To fear or not to fear, that is the question. How can we live without fear? Fear is so easy to fall into even before we know what hit us. Fear seems a reasonable response to much that life brings our way. Fear not? How are we to do it? The first component of the answer is theological and Jesus gives us the key: it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Theology simply means the study of God. What is God like? How does God think? What is our relationship to God? There are many such questions that people ask. A non-religious version might be, “What is the shape of ultimate reality?” Jesus tells us that our father, our God, takes great pleasure in sharing with us the riches of his vibrant life and infinite sovereignty. Have we not been promised that we will reign with Christ throughout all eternity?

The central problem is that before we are regenerated, given a new Spirit filled heart, we do not treasure the Kingdom of God. We develop our own little realms to rule and fill them up with possessions. Then we hoard and gather and protect them against all claims and comers who want or need them. So Jesus, in order to set us free from the idolatry that imprisons us, tells us to sell our possessions and give to the poor. We must empty our hands of earthly treasures that can be stolen or consumed by predators who want what we have.

Our possessions can quickly become our idols, the things to which we commit our valuable time and energy. The vigilance that it takes to guard our idols consumes all of our energy that should be rightly given to God in worship and service. Idolatry is really a lousy deal and a poor choice. It never leads us where we hope to go. Ultimately idolatry leads us into sloth. We squander both our time and our wealth on unworthy distractions.

I recently had a disturbing dream. In my dream I was a pastor (go figure) who had been entrusted with an enormous gift by a wealthy benefactor. The man showed up unexpectedly one day and wanted to walk around and see how we were doing. The place was a mess and badly deteriorating. As we went from

room to room and from bad to worse he went from being annoyed, to angry, to being outraged. There were a few people along the way in the various rooms who were not doing much of anything and who were so dispirited they wouldn't even look up. I remember that in the dream I was becoming ever more deeply ashamed over the shape of things. Finally he stormed away furious at our sloth and our waste of his gift.

The scene shifted. I was standing outside looking at a white clapboard structure, something like many of the small churches you see in New England. The paint was peeling badly as people sat around doing nothing and feeling ashamed and guilty and like they had nothing left at all. Their sense of defeat was palpable.

Then one man took a scraper in hand and began to scrape the paint and to say over and over, "But we still have each other." His voice grew louder and stronger, "We still have each other." The people began to rise, to join in the refrain, and finally they went about the work of restoration that the one lone soul had begun. Then I woke up.

All you amateur psychologists out there are welcome to analyze my troubled soul if you wish. Others of you will no doubt see some similarities between my dream and our text from Luke about the master suddenly returning from his wedding banquet. Jesus parable has to do with being ready and dressed for action when he arrives. The footnotes in my study Bible say that the verses of this story tell us four things.

First, Jesus is teaching them of the certainty of his return. There are certain irreducible elements of our Christian faith. We confess that Jesus was crucified, dead, and buried and that on the third day he arose from the dead, ascended into heaven and sits right beside God in the seat of all authority. From that place he will come to judge the living and the dead. We confess: I believe.

Secondly, coupled with the certainty we have of Jesus return to make all things new as he promised, we have the uncertainty of its timing. Faithfulness can get hard when you don't know what time it is. Many people live in the

illusion that they have plenty of time later to please God. In the meantime, they make a profession out of pleasing themselves. When your sense of time is desecrated and time is emptied of the awe and sense of the holy, sloth rushes in to despoil our lives which we waste in distraction, acquisition of possessions, and addictions to numb our own emptiness of heart. Jesus loves us enough to warn us that his return will be surprising and for many unexpected. Then what?

Thirdly, we know what time it is: the time is now! The present is the only time you really have. The past is gone, the future is not yet, now is what you live in and in eternity is what you will live in, the eternal now of God's presence. The time for faithful service is now. The time to be alert is now.

Jesus said the master might come in the middle of the night. There are times when life gets dark, when we can't see our way forward. In the dark it can be hard to hope in God. Many find darkness frightening. Or Jesus said the Master may come near dawn. We have a saying that the darkest hour is just before the dawn, which means I think, that the darkness has lasted a long time. We've been in the dark all night long. We've had time to be afraid and finally to just get weary. Disciples can get worn out after too much darkness. The temptation is strong in extended darkness to give in and give up and think that discipleship is just a wasted effort. Jesus says in those times, "Be ready." The master just may come at such a time.

The time to be dressed for action is now. Jesus is speaking to our hearts about the discipline of readiness. God created time. Time is fraught with God. God's rule and reign, the kingdom of God, is our one and only lasting treasure. In God is where our hearts are truly alive. In God is our heart's true home. In God is where our hearts belong. We were created to live and move and have our being in God our treasure. God has placed us in time to be partners with God in beauty and creativity.

Fourthly, Jesus points to the relationship between our present vigilance and our future rewards. If the master finds us ready, he will sit us down at his table and serve us from the overflow of his wedding feast. How topsy-turvy is the Gospel. Jesus came among us as one who serves. His heart, the heart of God, is a

servant heart. Jesus knelt down and washed the disciples' feet. Peter, and I'm guessing he spoke for all the rest when he said, "You will never wash my feet," was truly mortified by Jesus' humble slave labor as he knelt down at his feet. We quickly forget this spirituality from the bottom up instead of from the top down.

When Jesus tells us all to be dressed for action what does he mean? What kind of attire must we wear to be dressed for action? There are numerous texts that describe our wardrobe of readiness but perhaps the beautiful description from Colossians 3 will serve us best this morning.

Listen to it from The Message: *So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it. Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other.*

In some wonderful and significant way we accumulate treasure in heaven by loving one another here on earth. The same garments of readiness we put on to work with God in our time here is the same clothing we will wear when we are seated at the great wedding feast of the Lord and his bride, The Church, at the marriage supper of the Lamb. The Lion of Judah is identical with the Lamb who was slain. In Christ Jesus the lion and lamb lie down together. His meekness and his majesty are at home in each others' arms.

Are you longing to be a part of such glory? If Christ is your treasure, there you will find your heart. If Christ is not your treasure, you have lost your true heart in the worldly maze of idols and addictions. Now is the day of salvation. The only time you have to choose Christ as your true treasure is right now. Don't let the gift and the opportunity pass you by. For God's sake and for your own sake, say yes to Jesus Christ, today and every day.