

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost; August 28, 2022

+ Luke 12:32-40 +

“Look Forward with Full Confidence”

“Do not be afraid, little flock, because your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the needy. Provide money bags for yourselves that do not become old, a treasure in the heavens that will not fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

“Be dressed, ready for service, and keep your lamps burning. Be like people waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. Blessed are those servants, whom the master will find watching when he comes. Amen I tell you: He will dress himself and have them recline at the table, and he will come and serve them. Even if he comes in the second or third watch, they will be blessed if he finds them alert. But know this: If the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. You also be ready, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you are not expecting him.”

It's hard to find beauty in “don't.” People resent being told what they're not allowed to do, or what they shouldn't do. It's our default state of mind to bristle at the word “don't.” But how beautiful our Savior Jesus makes this word, “don't”!

Last week, we heard Jesus tell us, “Don't be greedy, like the rich fool. Don't rest your heart of worldly wealth and endlessly store it up for yourself.” “Don't.” Right after that “don't,” Jesus drops another one, in verses that connect last week's Gospel to this week's. In those verses, Jesus says, “Don't worry”: **“Stop worrying about your life, about what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear...Do not constantly chase after what you will eat or what you will drink. Do not be worried about it.”**

Don't be greedy. Don't worry. So maybe “don't” isn't always such an ugly word. Maybe when Jesus tells us “don't,” it's beautiful. Need more proof? **“Do not be afraid.”** This is now the third magnificent “don't” in a row that Jesus speaks in the span of twenty verses in Luke 12. “Don't be greedy; don't worry”; and now, “Don't be afraid.”

And wouldn't it wonderful if we fully followed these three don'ts every minute of our lives? Imagine a life where no greedy thought ever plagued your brain, a life where you never worried, and were never afraid! It sounds almost like heaven, doesn't it?

Well...it is heaven. Until we get there, we'll never get to a place in our lives where we are completely free from greed, worry, and fear. As long as we are here, we are sinful. And as long as we are sinful, we at least occasionally fall for the big lie that the value of our life is determined by how much we owe. And so we become greedy. As long as we here in this sinful world, we have moments when we worry about not having enough to live. We ignore the ravens who do not sow or reap and yet God feeds them. We forget the wild flowers that do not labor or spin, and yet God dresses them more beautifully than Solomon. We forget that we are more valuable to God than they are, so of course he will provide for us.

And as long as we are here, we still do what Jesus tells us today not to do. He says: Don't be afraid. And we fear. We fear not having enough. We fear when we notice about ourselves that we are what Jesus calls his **“little flock.”** We are outnumbered in this world, and it seems we could be easily overpowered. What

we have is not enough. Who we are is not enough. How easy to be afraid! Jesus says “Don’t do it. Don’t fear.” And still we do. Wouldn’t it be wonderful not to?

We’ll have to wait until heaven, I suppose. But can we be better at it now? Can we grow closer every day to living in the fabulous “don’ts” of Jesus Christ?

Perfection in these don’ts will wait until heaven. But we will improve – we will make a hard, long stride toward perfection – when we remember that heaven is coming. **“Do not be afraid, little flock, because your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom.”** In just a couple short weeks, Catechism instruction will begin for another fall. Catechism makes me nervous. (Not afraid, because that we would be violating Jesus’ command...but definitely nervous.) Because children around the age of twelve or thirteen tend to have a lot of questions – hard ones! – and they are not afraid to ask them.

I remember this one kid, a long time ago. Zach was his name. His dad was an atheist, and I suspect his dad was feeding him some of these questions: “If God promises to provide what we need, why are some people starving?” “If marriage is so important, why won’t people still be married in heaven?” Do you see why I get nervous? Well, here was another one of Zach’s questions: “So why did God make us anyway? If he knew we were going to sin and he would have to die a horrible death to save us, why go through with it?”

It’s easy to remember his question, harder to remember the answer I gave. But it should have been this verse, Luke 12:32: **“Do not be afraid, little flock, because your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom.”** God was pleased to do it. This is as close as the Bible ever comes to saying that God has fun doing something. So “fun” may not be the right word. But pleasure, enjoyment, is the concept. God makes people, watches them fall into sin, and personally saves them because he wants to. It gives him pleasure to give us his kingdom.

Jesus says God gives us **“treasure in heaven that will not fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.”** He does this because it pleases him. It pleased him to make the universe for us, the crown of his creation, and then to handcraft us in his image. It did not please him to watch us fall into sin in the Garden of Eden. (And I say “watch us fall” because Scripture teaches that when Adam fell, we all did.) But it pleased him to come to the rescue with the first promise of a Savior, a promise repeated to Abraham and his descendants for millennia until finally the Savior came.

It pleased God to redeem us – to buy us back from sin and Satan’s control – with the holy life and death of his Son. God enjoyed raising Jesus from the dead to show his rescue is real. And now it pleases him when this good news of Jesus reaches another set of ears and creates faith in another heart and brings the kingdom of God to one more soul. Because when God, with great satisfaction, gives the kingdom to each member of his little flock, he gives what lasts forever. He is pleased to give us **“treasure in heaven that will not fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.”**

Don’t be greedy here, Jesus says. Don’t worry about having enough here, Jesus says. Don’t be afraid, little flock that you are. Because the kingdom is ahead of you. Look forward to the treasure of heaven, and set your heart there. **“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”** Look forward, Christians. And you will be full of confidence. Confidence that will make you content with what God gives you here, because your true treasure is there. Confidence that he will give you what you need here, because if he’s pleased to give you the kingdom he will of course give you everything you need here. Confidence that

although our numbers may be small compared to those who oppose Jesus, although we are his little flock, we have eternal safety in the heavenly kingdom.

Don't, Jesus says. Don't, don't, don't. Don't be greedy. Don't worry. Don't be afraid. And wouldn't it be great if we didn't? Just look ahead. Focus on the kingdom God so gladly gives you. We have forgiveness for the times we have done what Jesus tells us not to do. And we have the power not to anymore. It comes when our eyes look ahead. The promise of the kingdom takes away greed, worry, and fear.

Now the results: **"Sell your possessions and give to the needy. Provide money bags for yourself that that do not become old, a treasure in the heavens that will not fail..."** When we look forward in faith, greed gives way to generosity. I will use the extra I have to provide for the other beloved and redeemed humans around me. And when we look forward in faith, worry dies. Just what are these money bags that do not become old? There are a lot of thoughts on this. I think the best idea is this: when your treasure in this world, the money bag you carry will always have a hole in the bottom. No matter how much is in your wallet or purse, it will never be enough for you. You'll never be satisfied. But when your treasure is in heaven, God sews up the bottom of your money bag. Whatever amount he puts in there is enough for you. And where is fear, when we look ahead in faith? We are looking forward to a treasure that never dies. So not even death itself will scare us.

There is a simple reason that sometimes we do what Jesus tells us not to do. There is a simple reason our eyes and hearts too often rest here instead of in the kingdom. We see, and hear, and touch what is here every day. We are surrounded by what is temporary, and it pulls our focus away. And so we need to be as immersed in the pleasure of God's promises at least as much as the physical world that surrounds us.

A few weeks ago we heard about Mary sitting at Jesus' feet while Martha hustled and bustled. Jesus' first words to her were: **"Martha, Martha..."** I hear sympathy in Jesus' voice. He's not angry with Martha. He feels sorry for her. She's missing out. So are we, when we make Martha's mistake and let the world pull our eyes off the kingdom. Where there is Communion, Christians must be there to receive it. When the Word is preached, Christians must listen. Where the Word is printed, Christians must read. Where it is taught, Christians must learn it. Consistently. Daily. To redirect our eyes and refocus our faith on the kingdom God delights to give us in his Son.

Then we look forward with confidence. And we live more and more in Jesus' divine don'ts. Not greed but generosity. Not worry but contentment. Not fear, but hearts at rest in the heavenly kingdom.

And there is one more critical result of looking ahead and resting our hearts in the kingdom to come. When we do, we will be ready for that kingdom to come. Not just ready for it, but longing for it. Jesus uses the parable of master who goes away to a wedding banquet. Wedding banquets were long celebrations of no set length. This is the picture of Jesus in heaven right now. He is the master who has ascended to heaven to celebrate his victory. He's gone for some amount of time, and we don't know exactly how long he'll be gone. Jesus says the master's servants (that's us!) need to be ready for him to come back at any time.

So, our eyes need to be on heaven, looking forward to it in faith. When they are, we will naturally be looking for Jesus to return. And not just ready and looking, but longing for it! Because he's coming to bring us the treasure of heaven. In the parable, Jesus pictures the blessings of heaven like this: **Blessed are those servants, whom the master will find watching when he comes. Amen I tell you: He will dress**

himself and have them recline at the table, and he will serve them. Even if he comes at the second or third watch, they will be blessed if he finds them alert.” So the master will come back and tell the servants: “You guys take it easy now. I’ll dress myself. You recline at the table, and I, the master, will serve you, the servants.” This is the kingdom we look forward to, the treasure we rest our hearts on: Jesus comes to bless us personally, to serve us richly in the kingdom God delights to give us!

Rest your heart on the treasure of heaven, and you’ll be ready for Jesus, whenever he comes: **“But know this: If the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. You also be ready, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you are not expecting him.”** It seems strange at first that Jesus compares himself to a thief. It’s a time to stick very tightly to the point of the comparison. Of course, Jesus doesn’t come to rob like a thief; he just got done telling us comes to serve the servants. Jesus is like a thief in that he comes without warning, at an unexpected time.

So he comes to bless, but comes at an unknown and even unsuspected hour. Is this a problem for us? Is it something to worry about? No. It is a warning to be ready, but not a cause for stress. Not for people with their eyes of faith pointing ahead to the kingdom.

So immerse yourself in the promise of God’s kingdom. He takes pleasure in giving it, and has given it to you in his Son Jesus. With your eyes of faith forward and your heart rested in the heavenly kingdom, you will live in the don’ts of Jesus Christ. Don’t be greedy. You won’t. You’ll be generous. Don’t worry. You won’t You’ll be content. Don’t be afraid, little flock that you are. You won’t. Because come what may, your treasure lasts forever. And when Jesus comes to bring it to you, you’ll be ready and waiting for it. Amen.