

**August 7, 2022    Rev. Katheryn McGinnis**

Let us pray. Faithful God, how blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Sanctify us by your Word and Spirit so that we may glorify you in the company of the faithful, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Our scripture for this morning comes from the gospel of Luke, chapter 12, verses 32 through 40. Listen now for the word of the lord.

<sup>32</sup> “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. <sup>33</sup> Sell your possessions and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. <sup>34</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. <sup>35</sup> “Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; <sup>36</sup> be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. <sup>37</sup> Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. <sup>38</sup> If he comes during the middle of the night or near dawn and finds them so, blessed are those slaves. <sup>39</sup> “But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. <sup>40</sup> You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

The word of the lord. **Thanks be to God.**

I’ve spent a lot of time recently thinking about backpacking. Which is a never a bad thing – as you all know, it’s something I love to do, and it is a huge part of my spiritual life. I’ve been thinking about it a lot recently because I’ve got a big backpacking trip coming up soon that I’m incredibly excited for.

In mid-September I’m planning on hiking the High Sierra trail – a trek that’s about 70 miles long through the sierras that starts in Sequoia National Park and finishes on Mount Whitney.

And as much excitement that I have about it, it’s also a lot to prepare for, which is why I’ve been thinking about it so much.

Backpacking, in general, always involves a lot of preparation. You’re going out into the wilderness for days at a time (sometimes more) with nothing except what you can carry on your back. So, to do this safely, you have to take time to prepare. You must make sure you have food, shelter, water, clothing to keep you warm and dry, medical supplies, the list goes on.

There are a lot of things that can happen out in the wilderness when you’re all alone. No help nearby, and that’s scary to realize. So, you prepare as best you can.

Our scripture passage today from the gospel of Luke is also about preparation.

Jesus tells his disciples that they have been given the kingdom and thus, they must ready for the son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour. And to be ready he tells his disciples to sell their earthly possessions and give the money to the poor, to have their lamps lit, to wait in anticipation for their master to return, to be so diligent in anticipation that a thief could not break into their house during the night.

And Jesus grounds all this preparation for God's kingdom in the simple charge: Do not be afraid.

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

Do not be afraid. Fear stands in the way of preparing for God's kingdom. Do not be afraid. But *there are* a lot of things to fear.

The disciples, hearing Jesus speak these words – they would have had a lot to fear. We have a lot to fear now. The truth of it all is that in our world there *is* a lot to be afraid of.

So much so, that our preparation, how we humans prepare for things, revolves a lot around fear.

We fear thieves, so we lock our houses. When I first moved here one of the first things I was told, by so many, was to never leave anything in my car because of car break ins.

I see so many auto glass repair shops here, more than I ever have before, preparing for these seemingly inevitable car break ins. Fear.

During Covid, especially the first days of the lockdown, I think we were all guilty of overbuying many things out of fear that we would run out. Food, toilet paper, hand sanitizer.

We have so much anxiety and stress about fear. Fear of the things we cannot control so we plan and prepare to do everything we can to prevent the things we fear from happening.

But Jesus tells us this all prohibits us from preparing for God's kingdom. We cannot be afraid to prepare for God's kingdom.

Human preparation rooted in fear is all about gripping and grasping for whatever control we can find. And when we do this, we stray further from the freeing truth that we are totally dependent upon God.

No matter what we can or cannot control, we're still always dependent upon God.

Jesus tells us, the little flock (which emphasizes our dependence on God) ... Jesus tells the little flock to not be afraid, for it is your father's good pleasure to *give* you the kingdom.

Give. God gives the kingdom freely to us. We did not earn it. Nor could we ever. It is God's pleasure to give it to us.

Thus, preparing for the kingdom should be and is a gift in and of itself. A gift rooted in giving the generosity we have done nothing to receive.

As freeing as this is, it's tough to realize. To understand. Even harder to live.

For, as most things that Christ teaches us, it's the exact opposite of the ways the word works. The ways that bring us comfort. Even the ways that bring us so much joy.

It's tough to let go of preparation rooted in fear. I've been thinking about that a lot – (preparation rooted in fear) especially while thinking about backpacking.

I can't let go of preparation rooted in fear when preparing for a backpacking trip. Maybe I can let go of excess fear – but fear keeps me safe out there. Fear of a bear attack makes me pack and store my food properly. Fear of hypothermia makes me pack adequate clothing and shelter. The list goes on.

And I've struggled thinking this through because backpacking is such a spiritual experience for me. I always feel renewed and close to God, and yet, I've prepared for that experience in fear. And realistically, that's not going to change. But maybe that's the point.

So much of our faith resides in the tension between the life we live, and the life Christ calls us to live. In the tension of the way we prepare for the worst, and the way Christ tells us to prepare for the best.

Preparing for the son of man, is to live a life marked by radical Christlike generosity and radical Christlike service.

Only God can bring God's kingdom here on Earth, which God is doing so, has done so, through Jesus Christ, the word made flesh. And it's a gift we're given.

In the Greek in this passage, the verb that expresses divine pleasure (verse 32- for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom) this verb is in the aorist tense – which means it's an action completed in the past.

As Richard Carlson explains, "in other words, God's delightful decision has already taken place. Thus, disciples seek God's kingdom precisely because God already decided to give them this kingdom."

We prepare knowing we already have received. Again, this turns our human conception of preparation upside down. We prepare in order to receive.

For example, retirement. We prepare for retirement by saving money throughout our lives. We have to save this money, before we receive retirement. Our preparation is what makes us receive.

But not for Christ. We have already received.

That's why preparation for God's kingdom cannot be rooted in fear. For what is there to fear? We have already been given God's kingdom. Now we are free to prepare.

To give away, so we have room to be filled. To serve abundantly so that in his death, Christ serves us. To be diligent that, like a thief in the night, we expect the unexpected. But this too is joyful, for Christ is nothing like we ever expect.

About this all, David Lose writes: "It is God's good pleasure – God's intention, plan, and delight – to give you the kingdom! If this is true, then disciples can, indeed, resist the seduction of wealth, not fall prey to constant anxiety about worldly needs, share what they have with others, and wait expectantly, even eagerly, for the coming of the Son of Man. The point of almsgiving, I think, is not to elevate poverty – circumstantial or chosen – but rather to extol generosity as a mark of the Christian life. Similarly, the watchfulness Jesus commands is not an anxious anticipation of the end of the world but rather an eager expectation of God's consummation of history."

Do not be afraid little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Fear gets in the way of a life of joyous preparation. Yet fear abounds.

And in the tension between the two, in the tension of the way we prepare for the worst, and the way Christ tells us to prepare for the best. That's where we must have faith. And that's where God meets us.

I don't really know how. But I do that even though when we do things like backpacking, where preparation is rooted in fear, when we face the fear and go, stepping into the wilderness, God always meets us there.

That's where we find God's kingdom. That's where we co-create, to bring God's kingdom here on earth. And for that, thanks be to God.

Amen.