

## Luke 12: 32-40 “In the Meantime, Faith”

What powerful but confusing images these are. I’m curious what you actually heard, what images stood out, and what images you are left with. Sunday after Sunday, we hear passages from the Bible presented to us as “Today’s Scripture Readings” or even Scripture lessons. We tend to listen to these selected passages from the scriptures as if each one of them were a self-contained unit, with a nugget of message to be discovered within. Such a segment taken from the Scripture is called Pericope. While a section is carefully selected by scholars who plan the lectionary, the original writer of the Gospel never meant to be a “standalone” lesson.

It’s like a TV series; sure, you can watch an episode and it has its own drama, but you can understand what’s going on much better when you’ve been watching the series from the beginning.

So, before digging in for that nugget of a lesson in today’s pericope, let’s start with where our memory is fresh, sort of.... What did we hear last week? It was in the title of my sermon, “Rich toward God.” It was the story of a rich farmer who stores up an abundance of crops to secure his future, without a thought to help others who may be hungry now. Through this story, Jesus called out our anxiety and the human tendency to grasp for things that we think would preserve our lives but really don’t. With the story, Jesus shows us how our anxiety and worry would detract us from living an abundant life God has for us, and invites us to be rich toward God instead, loosening our tight grip on our lives and offering ourselves to God, who is already at work to give us abundant life.

But it’s so hard and scary to let go of our “survival tool kit” when we know “how this world works,” whether it’s the way we manage our money or the way we navigate through relationships in our lives, at work, at home, or even at church.

Rather than love and give with abandon, we are on guard, we will not be fooled. That's what fear does to us.

So, today's pericope starts with these words of assurance. "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Jesus says God has always wanted to give God's kingdom, where God's love, mercy, and justice rule, to those whom Jesus calls "little flock," the ones committed to learning and following God's way of love, mercy, and justice, rather than the ways of the world. Out of love, God sent God's beloved son to show the world the Way, Jesus himself being the Way, though only a few would follow.

If we count ourselves among that little flock, the reign of God where we are all rich toward God, that's what's coming; we have Jesus's word for it. And here is the rub: to receive God's kingdom and to enjoy it as ours is to live into the very way of God, freely giving ourselves and our gifts in service of others, so no one lacks anything and everyone's heart is full of compassion and mercy, which is what God treasures most. When we look around the world, however, we see that we are not quite there yet, although we see glimpses of God's reign in moments of grace, if we are really paying attention, letting us know it is here.

So, our dilemma is, we have this promise of God that we will inherit the kingdom of God, while we wake up every morning in the world that goes by a different playbook. We wake up to see the world bleeding to death, starving to death, or suffering through scorching heat or overwhelming flood, all somehow related to the ways its inhabitants have chosen to live. How can we carry on as those who inherit the kingdom of God while all this is going on? What are we to do in the meantime?

The "little flock" of Jesus is not the first ones to live on the promise of God. God who sent Jesus to us is the God of Abraham who made a covenant with him. The other Scripture reading this morning from Hebrews that Barbara read to us,

reminds us, God promised Abraham that he would inherit a land that was promised to him, but he never came to possess it during his life. But Abraham had faith that allowed him to understand God's promise as the ultimate reality, even when it is not apparent to the eyes. Abraham's was the faith that was the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. And this faith made him obedient and allowed him follow God wherever he was led, with assurance and hope. His faith gave him the conviction that what God promised him was already his, even when he did not possess it; he lived as a stranger in a foreign land. In the meantime, Abraham lived by faith, in hope, trusting the promise made by God whom he knew to be faithful.

In the meantime, faith. Like Abraham's, our life is a pilgrimage that happens in the "meantime," between the promised kingdom of God where we live in the unity of the divine love, and the immediate reality of this beautiful but dangerous world. By faith, we have assurance what God promised us is our ultimate reality, and in hope, we lean on that promise to live in this world following God's way, in the meantime.

I am reminded of beautiful wedding vows I recently had the honor of reading. In mutual love and trust, noble promises were made, of what they shall remain to each other so long as they both shall live. It is to those vows they would return when the hardships come, to keep faith in each other, to keep on loving each other, in this beautiful and dangerous world.

Our life is a pilgrimage along the long arch of the moral universe that bends towards justice, as Dr. King said, and in the meantime, we live by faith, following the way of God in the reign of God, pursuing peace in times of war, bringing healing where there's suffering, working toward restoration where there's been destruction, without losing hope.

And that's being alert and watchful. To keep hope and live by faith, continuing in the ways of God's kingdom even when the world all around is going haywire. Going back to the Luke's passage, Jesus seems to jump from reassuring the little flock not to be afraid, to commanding them to be ever so watchful and ready. He continues "Be dressed for action and have your lamp lit, 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."

But the imperative for watchfulness is not a command to be on the edge of one's seat all the time. If one does not lose hope and keep living by faith, one is ever ready to receive the reign of God. So, this urgent call to be ready at all times is really encouragement to not to lose hope and not to give up living into the way of God, even when the world shows no sign of turning around in repentance.

Keeping faith and keep hoping; what does that look like? We keep on loving our God and our neighbors, as if the kingdom of God depended on it. What does it look like in your life? In our church? To keep working for the cause you believe is helping the world become a better place, even when we don't see the results. To keep engaging with the life of our community, practicing love, mercy, justice, forgiveness.... To keep engaging the long arc of the moral universe to make it bend a bit closer to justice.

Yesterday, August 6<sup>th</sup> was the 77<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the atomic bomb dropped in Hiroshima, and then on Nagasaki on August 9<sup>th</sup>, and Japan surrendered on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1945, ending the World War II. As you know, the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy committed countless, unspeakable atrocities before and during that War. My mother used to tell me how happy she was, as a girl of 9 years, to learn that the war was over, because she could go home to her family.

I was born 20 years after that war, and I remember hearing this popular song growing up in Japan. It says "We were born, after the war. We grew up without

knowing wars. We are adults now, about to start walking on, with songs of peace on our lips. We want you to remember our name, we are the children who know no wars.” When this song came out in 1970, this was not the case in the world, nor has it ever been. What is ours to do, in the meantime, in Faith?

In closing, let us listen to the Psalm of the day.

Psalm 33 12-22

- <sup>2</sup> Happy is the nation whose God is the LORD,  
the people whom he has chosen as his heritage.
- <sup>13</sup> The LORD looks down from heaven;  
he sees all humankind.
- <sup>14</sup> From where he sits enthroned he watches  
all the inhabitants of the earth—
- <sup>15</sup> he who fashions the hearts of them all,  
and observes all their deeds.
- <sup>16</sup> A king is not saved by his great army;  
a warrior is not delivered by his great strength.
- <sup>17</sup> The war horse is a vain hope for victory,  
and by its great might it cannot save.
- <sup>18</sup> Truly the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him,  
on those who hope in his steadfast love,
- <sup>19</sup> to deliver their soul from death,  
and to keep them alive in famine.
- <sup>20</sup> Our soul waits for the LORD;  
he is our help and shield.
- <sup>21</sup> Our heart is glad in him,  
because we trust in his holy name.

<sup>22</sup> Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us,  
even as we hope in you.