

St. Peter Lutheran Church - Modesto, CA

✠ Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost ✠

August 19, 2007

Sermon by Pastor Johann Caauwe

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom."

Luke 12:32

It's easy to say "Don't be afraid" when a fear is unfounded. If a child is afraid of the dark, and thinks that there is a monster under the bed or in the closet, it's easy to say 'don't be afraid' when there really is no monster.

It's not quite that easy when the fear is real. When the object of the fear is real, you can't just say "don't be afraid." You have to give a good reason not to be afraid, or explain that you'll be all right in spite of the danger, or that it might not be as bad as it seems.

Jesus said to his disciples and says to us "Do not be afraid." But he doesn't just say that. He doesn't just say "Don't be afraid" and then leave us to deal with the things that cause fear in our lives. He says "don't be afraid" and then **Jesus drives fear from his little flock**. He drives out a very real fear. He drives out fear with a real gift from the Father.

Actually, at the point where our text picks up, Jesus has already told his disciples to not be afraid a couple times. In verses 4-7, Jesus said don't be afraid of people who can harm you physically. The reason was that you are worth more to God than sparrows, and God even takes care of sparrows.

In verses 8-12, Jesus says not to be afraid when you are brought in before authorities, when you are being persecuted, because in those times the Holy Spirit will give you the words to speak.

In verses 22-31, Jesus says not to worry about your life, your food, your clothes. Here he gives two reasons: 1) worrying doesn't help anything, and 2) your heavenly Father knows you need them.

These were not imaginary fears. They were real problems. History tells us that the people Jesus was speaking to had reason to fear. The early Christians were persecuted. Severely. Many were even killed for their faith. The early Christians also suffered through famine and poverty. For them to wonder "what will I eat" or "what shall I wear" wasn't a matter of choosing from a menu or from their walk-in closets. A time would come when they would have nothing.

Jesus said to these people, "**Do not be afraid.**" And as if they didn't have enough to be afraid of, Jesus mentioned one more. He said "**Do not be afraid, little flock.**" Jesus described his followers as a flock of sheep, which, by itself is not necessarily reason for alarm. Actually, to be reminded that we are the sheep and Jesus is the Good Shepherd is a rather comforting thought. That thought actually takes away fear.

But Jesus calls his followers a little flock. Little flocks of sheep are more vulnerable to attacks by wolves. Little flocks don't provide the kind of protection that a large one does.

Why does Jesus describe them as a little flock? Most likely, Jesus is simply referring to the fact that his followers would be outnumbered by those who were not his followers. They would be

the minority. And as such, this little flock would continually be attacked, attacked by persecutors with swords, attacked by false teachers with their errors, and attacked again and again by Satan with his lies and deceptions.

But this was nothing new. It's not just during Jesus' ministry that we hear of a little flock. Abraham was one man without an heir, but it was through him and his descendants that God promised the Savior. In the rest of the Old Testament God repeatedly talks about a chosen remnant of people that he was preserving. Out of all the people in the world, out of all the people in the nation of Israel, the true believers were a little flock.

And today, it appears that Jesus' description of his followers still applies. We are a little flock. The fastest growing church bodies in the United States are non-Christian. Most mainline Christian denominations in the United States are declining in numbers. Our own church body is losing numbers and Lutheran school enrollments are in decline. We are a little flock, and as it seems, getting smaller. We are a little flock which has the same kind of concerns and real fears that the people of Jesus' day faced.

We are concerned about the future. We are not only concerned about our own personal needs, but also about this little flock of which we are a part. We are concerned about the growing number of unchurched people in our neighborhoods and the subsequent loss of morality in our society. We are concerned about the spiritual well-being of our children, concerned that they will continue in the training we have given them. These are real concerns. Our neighbors, our society, our children, and we ourselves really face the temptations and tricks of the Devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh.

Jesus recognized that these things were worth being afraid of. Earlier in this chapter Jesus said, **"But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him."** The danger is real. Sin is real. Death is real. Hell is real.

To those who live among real dangers, to those concerned about the future, to those who are part of Jesus' little flock, Jesus says **"Do not be afraid."**

But just as there are good reasons to be afraid, Jesus also gives good reason not to be afraid. In fact he gives us several. He does this with just one simple sentence. **"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom."** With each word he uses Jesus piles reason upon reason for us not to be afraid.

The subject of this sentence is **"your Father."** Jesus is talking about God the Father, his father. But here Jesus emphasizes that God is *our* father; that we have a relationship with the Creator of the heavens and the earth. That relationship is not our doing, but God's. It is one that he initiated and established, and one that he continues to preserve day by day. We need not fear because our Father cares for us more than any earthly father and can do more for us than any earthly father.

"Your father has been pleased to give you the kingdom." The verb, or the action of this sentence, is made up of a number of different parts, but they all join to make one very strong point about what our Father has done.

He "has been pleased." "Has been" it is an accomplished fact. There is no question whether or not our Father has done this. There is no question about whether it will be true in the future, no matter what the future holds.

He "has been pleased." This action did not originate in the mind of man. It's not something we thought of or asked for. But it was simply God's good pleasure to do it.

He “has been pleased to give.” The action that God decided to do was to give something. He was not paying a wage, or returning a favor, or rewarding some activity; he was giving a gift, a free gift.

All these phrases combine to impress upon us the fact that God really did this on his own, freely, without any input from us or effort on our part.

And what did he give? “the kingdom” He gave to us the place where he rules, the place where God’s will reigns supreme. Where is this kingdom that God has given to us? Certainly God rules all things in heaven and on earth. But we know that this kingdom is not an earthly kingdom, so it’s not a kingdom that we can see with our eyes.

If we look with our eyes, we may see just the opposite. If we look with our eyes, it may appear that Satan is reigning. If we look at our world, we’ll see wickedness in every corner. If we look at ourselves, we’ll see wickedness in every corner.

When we look at the world with our eyes, we don’t see the kingdom in which God reigns. No, then we see all kinds of reasons to be afraid. And so we don’t look for the kingdom with our physical eyes.

The kingdom is not something we need to find but something God has given to us that drives away fear. It’s what allowed Abraham to leave his home for a new land. It’s the same promise God made to Abraham when he told him that God would be his very great reward. It is the promise of salvation from sin. It is this promise apprehended by faith. Faith drives away fear.

It drives away fear because it is “being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” By faith we don’t focus on all the real reasons we have to be afraid. By faith we focus on the real *gift* God has given to us. By faith we know that salvation is ours. God’s promise of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are ours, and they are assured to us in God’s Word and sealed in the Sacraments. By faith we know God preserves us in our faith when we make use of those means of grace. By faith we know that no matter what may come upon us in the future, he uses his Word and Sacraments to guard the gift he has given to us and bring us to him in heaven.

And someday, the kingdom that is ours now will be the one we see. Someday our faith will match our sight, and we will see Christ our King rule, and we will reign with him.

But while we are on earth, Jesus says to us “Do not be afraid, little flock.” Even though there are many real reasons you might be afraid. **“Do not be afraid...for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.”** With this single sentence, Jesus does not merely *wish* us to stop fearing, or *encourage* us to stop fearing, to *convince* us to stop fearing. With this single sentence Jesus drives away fear. He drives away fear with his promise of things unseen. And since faith is being certain of things unseen, Jesus certainly drives away all fear and replaces it with a real and certain gift.