

9th Sunday after Pentecost August 11 2019

Genesis 15:1-6; Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16; Luke 12:32-40

Do not be afraid! It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.

That's all we really need to know. Believe that and you've got the Gospel. The Good News!

Do not be afraid! What a gift to hear this, but also what a challenge. There seems to be a lot to fear today; A changing climate that brings tremendous downpours and the hottest July globally on record; Division here in the US- along racial and ideological lines; Instability in governments around the world; A trade war that is beginning to bite; Mass shootings averaging more than one a day. And all this can be made to seem worse by those who prey on our fears to try and sell us; things, ideas, ideologies.

And then there is the challenge of what Jesus calls us to; sell your possessions, give alms, store your treasure in heaven. Love God and your neighbor- the one who is in need. Forgive those who sin against you. Love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you. And the pressure of those things grows on us. And we might begin to think that all this stuff is just so much nonsense. Certainly not something worth wasting time over.

But listen to the whole line again.

Do not be afraid! It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. And remember again the prayer Jesus taught us just a few weeks ago, a reminder that

God provides us all we need for today and tomorrow, and the parable that taught us that God's desire and work is to provide us with good things!

It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom. God delights in providing God's children with good things. Just as it was God's good pleasure to grant Abram and Sarai a son, an heir. Just as the community addressed in the letter to the Hebrews are reminded of the promise that they too have received the Kingdom. So, we too have been promised that Kingdom. And not just that, we have been given that Kingdom.

Given the Kingdom... we've got it already, folks! We don't earn it or do anything to keep it. So, what Jesus lays out for us are not conditions for getting the kingdom or even keeping it, rather they are an invitation to live into the reality of what we already have.

The writer of Hebrews talks about faith as the assurance of things hoped for. The conviction/ confidence in things not seen. For us, faith is simply living as if the gift of God were true. Living the reality that we are in the Kingdom of God. Now It's that simple, and that difficult.

Even Abram and Sarai- founders of the Jewish tradition, are not perfect in their faith, their living as if the promise of a son is already fulfilled. In the very next chapter of Genesis (Chapter 16), Abram will be talked into trying to fulfill what God has promised by having a child with Hagar, his wife's servant. Abram and Sarai get tired of waiting and decide that they will rely, not on God to act, but on humans to act on behalf of God. "We'll make God's promise happen!"

It reminds me of the Christians who want to help rebuild the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem because that will force Jesus to return to the earth because they believe this is one of the prerequisites of that. I don't think that's how God works.

It will be many years before God fulfills God's promise to Abram and Sarai. And God will need to remind Abram of this promise at least twice before it is fulfilled. But ultimately, despite their mistrust at times, God fulfills God's promise in Isaac, Abram and Sarai's son.

Those who have come before us, Abram and Sarai, Peter and Mary, Paul and Priscilla, Martin and Katie Luther, our own parents and grandparents, all those who built this community of faith that is St. John; all have had that faith in things hoped for. Confidence in things not seen. Even though they, like the author of Hebrews says, have all "died in faith without having received the promises," They all, from a distance, "saw and greeted them." This is the reality of living in the already (you've got it!) but not yet (it's not complete).

Peter, Mary, Paul, and Priscilla stood in the midst of the kingdom of Rome where military power, fear, and coercion ruled and they proclaimed and lived the Kingdom of God with Jesus Christ at its head. Our parents and grandparents saw the kingdom of God in a community where siblings in Christ cared for one another. Where we loved God and loved our neighbor with equal abandon. And they lived that way.

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What then, about us? How do we live as if this promise of God is true? That God has indeed claimed us in the waters of baptism. That in those waters God indeed became our Abba, Father, and we are God's children now. That God desires only to provide good things for us and will.

As one pastor put it, this text reminds us that we have been justified, made right in our relationship with God...it is our Father's good pleasure to give us the Kingdom. So, since that is the case, how then shall we live?

Do not be afraid!

What would it mean to live our own lives without fear! Do not be afraid! The refrain we hear 6 times in Luke from the angels to the shepherds on that Christmas eve to Jesus speaking to us now.

What are you afraid of, brothers and sisters? What is the fear that lies deepest in your heart? That drives your living. For I bet we all have something. For Abram it was that he would have no offspring, that his line would end with him. God's promise is that Abram will indeed live on through his own DNA.

Whatever fear drives you... loss of health, loss of wealth, death...

Do not be afraid! You have the kingdom. So...live that way! Live the reality of that Kingdom even as we acknowledge that it is not yet fully here.

What freedom there is in living that way! Trusting that it is God's pleasure, God's desire to care for us, love us, give us good things. When we live in that freedom, within that promise, how much easier it is to live with a sense of courage rather than lock ourselves away in fear. To reach out in love rather than to lash out in

hate. To hold our abundance with open hands, rather than gripping it close. To love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, rather than chase after the false gods of security, distraction, and false importance.

Do not be afraid! You have the Kingdom, so love God with all that you are. Love your neighbor – the one in need- as yourself.

And yet.... we know we will stumble along the way. This might cause us to despair, to give up. Think of this as a task too difficult to do. But then we get the reminder that God does not call us to perfection, just to faith. For even these ancestors of our faith, Sarai and Abram stumble... Peter stumbles... Paul stumbles... our parents and grandparents...stumbled.

So we, like they, need reminders. To be given a glimpse of the promises from a distance, so that we might see and greet them anew. To be reminded that we have already been given what has been promised. That we live in that kingdom now, even as it is not fully here yet.

We gather, weekly, around Word and Sacrament to hear again these words- Do not be afraid! For it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. We gather, weekly, to practice Kingdom living. To practice forgiving one another- so that we might live that more fully during the week. To practice loving God with everything that we are- heart, soul, in voice and body- so that we might continue to love God more fully during the week. To practice loving our neighbor- the one in need- and re-learn the proper relationship with our own abundance. So that we might live that same generosity more fully during the week.

Do not be afraid!

I would invite you this week to pay attention, pay attention to those moments where fear rises up and shapes your action. And when you find one of those moments, stop! Remember- Do not be afraid! And change your action. Do what you would do if you were not afraid. And taste the freedom we have been given by our God. Who desires only good things for us.

Do not be afraid! It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.