

9th Sunday after Pentecost August 7 2022

Genesis 15:1-6; Luke 12:32-40

Can you think of someone you know whose greatest joy is in giving people that perfect gift? Or who enjoys most helping others? Often when they won't spend a dime on themselves.

My father is one of the most generous people I know- during the height of the great recession he saw how many people were needing the help that Crisis Assistance in Charlotte, NC provided, so he pledged to give Crisis Assistance each month an amount equal to the utility usage at his office. He has continued to be generous in this way. This from a man who is wearing the jeans I outgrew in high school because there is still good wear in them! Do you know people like that? The people you have in mind are those who find great joy in providing for others. And God is like that to the nth degree.

Do not be afraid, Jesus says to us disciples, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. The language used means that it is an ongoing action- one that has started now, is sure but is not necessarily completed at this moment. It's the equivalent of Jesus saying- don't worry, you've already won the \$1.28 billion dollar lottery. It's yours, even if it isn't in the bank quite yet, so then... how are you going to live?

Do not be afraid, Jesus says- it is a phrase used frequently in scripture. God uses it with Abram in our reading from Genesis, "Do not be afraid, I am your shield and your recompense for following me will be great."

Do not be afraid. What is it that you fear? Right now, in your life.

I asked that question on Wednesday and got answers that included- a changing climate, flooding in Kentucky, war in Ukraine, conflict here in the US. But I'm sure it would also include losing things- our health, our job, our family, our freedom, our privileges. Any of those resonate?

For Abram, his biggest fear is that his life will mean nothing- that all he has will be inherited by someone not of his blood. Now, we could point to the text from Ecclesiastes last week and remind him that will always be the case- ultimately- but in that day and age it was a source not only of anxiety but shame to not have a male heir. God says, don't be afraid. Look up, Abram. You see those stars? Your descendants will be more than those.

This abundant generosity is who God is. All Abram wants is one kid. That really is all that matters to him. One son, to carry on his name. To inherit what he has to give. And God says, look up. I'm giving you as many descendants as the stars and more. God wipes out any cause for Abram to be afraid. So now he can live free of fear. What a gift! One God is pleased to give.

Just before this text Chapter 12 of Luke Jesus has told the disciples not to worry about their lives. Remember, the word used for worry means to be pulled apart. Each worry- how long will I have this job, can we afford that, how will I be able to retire, pulls a piece of us away. We know this feeling don't we? It's what keeps us up at night.

Don't worry, Jesus says- for God provides what all creation needs- plants, animals, trees, insects- how much more will God provide your daily bread? Us who are created in God's image. And now, besides, Jesus says, God has already given you

the kingdom. And we know from our text from Galatians a few weeks ago the Kingdom is rooted in the self-sacrificial love of God as shown to us in Jesus. And from that root of love grows the character of the kingdom- also known as the fruits of the Spirit: Joy- based in the grace of God, Peace- shalom- wholeness, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

This God has already given you. So, rejoice- you've already won the lottery! There is no longer any reason to be afraid. To worry. For nothing that happens in this world will change the fact that the kingdom is yours. So, live as if it were real.

That is faith. Abram, who won't see that promised child for several years yet and who will never see the promised multitudes, trusts the word of this God who he has followed into the wilderness, and he begins to live as if the promise were truly his. Faith, as the author of Hebrews reminds us, is the assurance that things hoped for will happen. That those things not seen are there.

It is by faith so many of our ancestors have lived as if the promise of the kingdom were true. Even though they have not received it in its fullness- indeed sometimes have only seen it from afar and greeted it, as Galatians says. But never have they not had what is both promised and already given.

Do not be afraid, little flock. Do not worry yourselves into pieces, because God has already given you the kingdom. Has loved you back into life and opened to you life fuller and more abundant than what the reign of this world can give. Certainly more than your worrying can do. Because when has your worrying ever changed or prevented anything? Now, transform your mind. Change your stinkin' thinkin' and try it God's way.

So much of the grief in our lives is driven by this fear that is the way the world thinks. The bitter divide within our nation today has roots in the fear of losing something. Privilege, power, influence, the way things have always been. But what we find is that when we follow the logic of God, not this world, what looks like loss- is actually gain. That when we welcome and celebrate the diversity of God's creation our life is fuller, more abundant.

This call to not be afraid, to not worry does not mean we don't take seriously or don't respond to injustice. To those things that challenge the reign of God. Rather, it means we are free to do so because we know the kingdom is already ours, we already live within its bounds and under the reign of God who provides for us abundantly. So, we have nothing to fear. We do not worry ourselves into pieces because what does that worry do anyway except pull us apart.

So, we are bold to speak up and act when that kingdom is not being fully expressed here and now. We are freed to be generous with what God has first given us. To join the delight of God in sharing our abundance with others so that they might not be afraid about where their next meal will come from, where they will sleep, how they will find a treatment for their disease or illness.

Do not be afraid my friends, you are already a winner! God has called and chosen you and delights in giving it all away. God is not some stingy curmudgeon demanding perfection for a scrap of the heavenly grace- but a prodigal father who showers all God's children with abundance such that their cups overflow. If it doesn't seem like it to you, perhaps you're looking at the wrong cup.

You ever have a pet or even a small child who just won't look where the abundance is? They get so focused on the place they think it ought to be they miss the gift. Look in the right place, for the kingdom is yours. It lies not in power, prestige, money. Rather it lies in an abundance of love, peace, grace, forgiveness, joy, generosity. A world in which all have enough.

Do not be afraid, my friends in Christ. Rather, trust in the one who has proved time and again to be faithful. Who delivers on even impossible seeming promises. More descendants than the stars. Who calls us to something different from what the world says is worth pursuing. Who in Christ has given us a foretaste of the feast to come.

Do not be afraid, little flock. For it is your father's good pleasure to have already given you the kingdom where God's love and peace reign. Thanks be to God.