

Proper 14
 Luke 12:32-40
 Aug 7, 2022
 Mary Barnett

Jesus said to his disciples, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Now first off: I just have to say....

Isn't it obvious that Jesus is talking directly to us?

I mean **literally us?!**

this little flock gathered right here in this small and hopeful chapel?

Do not be afraid little flock

Can't you hear the affection in his voice??

Don't be afraid little flock that you aren't big enough or bright enough or rich enough or pretty enough for God's good love and attention.

Don't be afraid that who you are,

Or who we all are

right now is not good enough or great enough or solvent enough for God's loving attention.

Because It is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom...

The readings for this week read like air conditioning for hot and tired souls

And that is Good news

even to me

who often likes my bad news first ...I like to know the unvarnished facts of what I'm up against before the other shoe drops

But these readings for today filled me w hope *in spite of myself*

Which is a good thing because I guess you could say that bringing Good News is supposed to be my job description

And sometimes the world is too much with me.

But today I share this good news particularly in honor of Antiny Paul Neville who we will baptize right here next week

And our long time parishioner Mary Verdick who we laid to rest this week And her lovely granddaughter Jennifer who graced my office for the first time on Tuesday (and the two couples I met with to plan their weddings this week...such depth of field....don't I have the best job ever?)

Do not be afraid little flock...

It is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom...

Good Pleasure...that certainly is a wonderful phrase to hear in church

A wonderful phrase to find in this Bible that has often been used erroneously to shame and control people

especially women and

other even *more* marginalized people who have been taught that their pleasure is bad or dangerous or somehow threatens other people

or that their freedom is bad or dangerous and threatens the way things have always been

or that becoming their *true selves* is bad or dangerous

or that being able love who they love is bad or dangerous

And who have been taught that God's main function is to judge THEM harshly as opposed to everyone else who gets the A Train to heaven!

Nope.

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

Listen

If it is our Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom and we are all made in the image of God, then it is clear that we in turn are meant to take pleasure in receiving this kingdom.

This kingdom that Jesus tells us again and again and again is already within us and can not be taken away by anyone

So ...Jesus says, go ahead:

Sell your possessions, and give alms. Support the soup kitchen. Give to Dortha's fundraisers for Ukraine AND Kentucky. Collect all the stuff you have laid up in barns (as Bill preached last week) and donate it to the city wide tag sale that takes place right here on

September 17th. Lighten your load. Support others. Leaven your life with hope and prayer. Clean out those closets. Put down that old baggage. Keep your hands open for new opportunities. And...my favorite... **Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit!** So that when that stranger knocks on your door in the middle of the night or even the middle of the afternoon with a gift for you that you didn't expect and *maybe didn't even want*, you will be able to receive it.

Speaking of which...

A woman I didn't know came to visit me this week to plan a funeral for her grandmother. When I asked her her denomination she stuttered a bit. *Well...she said It is really... i don't know what to call it...she said gently. I guess you'd say, I go to more of ..um...a Christian church.*

I laughed.

Well...I think we are a Christian church, I said . I mean we aim to be!

But I knew what she was driving at. I'd been there once myself:

A church focused more on Jesus than on denominational structures!

A church enlivened with the confidence of Jesus NOW!

rather than on puzzling over what the Bible might have meant *THEN!*

A church perhaps more focused on answers than on questions!

On spontaneous prayer rather than prayers in a old book!

A church *with a pool!* that offers parishioners a dollar off on gas!!

Oh sweet Jesus

Yes!

I knew what it was like to love a church like that.

(And heck I thought...maybe we could just worship there just in August?)

But I was also tempted to jump up and down on my sofa like some crazed Tom Cruise shouting

At Holy Trinity we love Jesus too!!!

*Maybe... we just **contain** it differently. :)*

The kingdom of God is within you, Jesus said.

I might have told her how I'd been a member of a non- denominational church for awhile but had eventually been burnt by a not-so-great minister

And how I'd come to appreciate a centuries-old historical structure and a pattern of worship that holds me even when I can't love the minister anymore (which could happen to you!) I could have said that the hierarchical structure frustrates the heck out of me some of the time

But also reassures me, that no one person or parish or political party owns Jesus or is infallible or can perfectly interpret the Bible for me or is incontrovertibly 100% on God's side *no matter the vehemence of their arguments.*

Maybe even particularly because of the vehemence of their arguments

Prayer and hope and faith can feel so illusive when it feels like the world is falling apart, when we feel powerless, when we've had covid for a long month and it's still hard to catch our breath.

The kingdom of God is within you Jesus says again. *And where your treasure is there your heart will be also.*

The first morning I could take a full breath after 3 nights with Covid when we thought I was headed for the hospital was a miracle. I was SO grateful. It was LITERALLY as if I'd never really breathed before.

In Hebrew the word for spirit is Ru hah...isn't that beautiful?

In Hebrew the word for spirit is Ru Hah: the sound of an inhale and an exhale, of God breathing over the water and breathing into us... *life*

Ru hah.

The kingdom of God is within you Jesus says again. *And where your treasure is there your heart will be also. And where your heart is...there is your treasure.*

Ru Hah

In that moment, I realized viscerally that people are my treasure. Yes and God and the people in whom I experience God:

My friends and family. The people gathered around me. Not people I have specifically chosen or interviewed for their special characteristics. Not people I always agree with...Ru hah

And then I thought, this little flock, this church is like that too: a family, and where your heart is there will your treasure be.

This new friend and I, (we would get to the funeral planning part) then agreed that the admonition to surrender to God in prayer can be hard one.

It can be a complicated word... *surrender*, depending on your personal experience. Surrender can sound like an abdication. And some of us have become fighters for a reason. We may be longing to be reborn, to enter a new relationship w God, with ourselves and with the world around us,

Longing to open our hearts and follow Jesus. but you can't love until you can let yourself be loved.

What about the word allow instead? she said.

Yes, I said.

So little flock: How might we *allow* ourselves to remember that God loves *even us*, even as we get bad news, as we relapse or fall off the wagon or yell at our kids (which obviously I never do) or lose a job or lose a loved one and have to begin yet again. Where do we get the courage?

If we focus only on what has been evil in our own lives, or on what we think is wrong w us... on what we think we need to do to make ourselves acceptable ...our vision narrows. Our suffering increases And eventually we will look somewhere *for something* to dull the pain. But the fact is being alive ...is often painful. Jesus knew this better than anyone. + Maybe if we can let go of the stories we tell ourselves about the pain And allow ourselves to *just feel it*, like Jesus did. our hearts will expand Even on the cross.

It's like God gives you a cake mix my new friend says

A cake mix? I said

Yes...A cake mix.

All the ingredients are there she said but maybe they are a bit mixed up and it takes some time and some real effort on your part to sort them out and some assembly is required.... you can't just be passive.

Yes I said and then added what I think is the Anglican perspective.

The thing is what the cake will look like remains a mystery, perhaps your whole life. Like you kind of have to assemble it in the dark. Which is tough if you are already baking challenged. I mean you don't get a picture faxed down from God to put up on Pinterest to tell you exactly what your cake is going to look like. You have to trust you have been given what you need.

The kingdom of God is with in you Jesus says again, getting a little annoyed.

So remember no matter how battered by the world we may be

Or who has shamed us

Or how we have shamed ourselves

Or what has been taken away

Or who has taken it

Or what has *never been adequately given*

No matter if one day the unthinkable happens

And someone turns on you in an act of senseless violence and something happens to you or someone you love that could never ever have happened for any God reason whatsoever...

The kingdom of god is within you,

Jesus says

looking down from the cross

And where your heart is there is your treasure

Ru Hah

And It will never never never be taken away.

amen