

Worship Service *“Fear-less”*

Pentecost 9, Year C, 7th August, 2022

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16 NRSV / Luke 12:32-40 NRSV

Prelude

Opening Music (Video)

Fearless

dc Talk

written by George Cocchini, Kevin Max Smith, Mark Heimermann, Michael Tait, TobyMcKeehan, CCLI song number 2862451, Achtober Songs / Blind Thief Publishing / Out of Twisted Roots Music / Popopen Music (Admin. by Capitol CMG Publishing & Moon & Musky Music), posted to YouTube by Juan Carlos Nava, used and reported under CCLI Streaming License 20261246

Welcome Guests / Announcements

Pass the Peace

Opening Hymn

Come, We That Love the Lord

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Call to Worship (responsive)

One: God has called us like Moses in the wilderness,
the prophets in the hills, and the disciples in the cities.

All: They shared their blessings so that we might know God’s presence here.

One: Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,
let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely.

**All: Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us,
looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.**

Invocation

We come convinced of many things
but trusting very few.

Holy God of limitless surprises,
meet us here

in this place

as we touch that which we can not see
that which we have not dared to hope.

Epistle Reading – Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16 NRSV

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Indeed, by faith[a] our ancestors received approval.

By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.[b]

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going.

By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.

For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old—and Sarah herself was barren—because he considered him faithful who had promised.

Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, ‘as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.’

All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth,

for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.

If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return.

But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

Annual Conference Sharing

Roger and Kathy Edmark

A Time of Prayer

Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you tell us not to be afraid of what the future holds, not to worry about tomorrow, but you know how difficult we find it to heed your words. For we worry about so many things, our families, our friends, our circumstances, some worries big worries, most worries tiny niggles. We come before you this day with these big and tiny worries, and with confidence we know we can lay them all at your feet.

We bring our big worries about health and happiness and security for ourselves and for our loved ones. We bring big worries about the world we live in and its future existence as we continue to fail to address so many ecological problems. We bring big worries about the way people in our world are treated as less than human, exploited, tortured, helpless and abused.

Father God, we know that you are concerned with every aspect of our lives, so we also bring the little things that concern us, the worries which keep us awake at night, the worries which only you know.

Living God, reach out to all those for whom the future brings fears and uncertainties. Assure them that you are with them, even when that future seems dark and circumstances feel like they are spiraling out of control. Remind them that you are able to transform even the bleakest of situations, bring healing and wholeness.

Lord we make our prayers in faith, for we know that your Spirit is at work in our world making all things new. **Amen**

Hymn

God of Grace and God of Glory **306**

Gospel Reading

Luke 12:32-40 NRSV

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

Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

‘Be dressed for action and have your lamps 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.

Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them.

If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.

‘But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into.

You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.’

Message – *Fear-less*

What do you fear? What is it that keep you awake at night? There is certainly a lot to choose from today, isn't there? From diseases like COVID-19 and Monkey Pox, to a rapidly warming climate, to gun violence and terrorism, there is much to cause us concern. A worsening economy, hunger, poverty, and homelessness are impossible to escape if you walk the neighborhoods, have an internet presence, or watch the news. It's everywhere you look. If we weren't afraid before, we are certainly encouraged by the media and our culture to be afraid now, on both sides of the political spectrum.

We've become a culture driven by fear. Fear has become a valuable commodity and tool by many to drive us to support viewpoints that place blame on others, creating distrust and scapegoats. Yet into that fear, across centuries of human experience, Jesus' teaching in today's lesson offers an extraordinary word of comfort in an increasingly threatening world: "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kin-dom." This is not shallow comfort and platitudes but rather the reassurance that what is seen is not all that is, a reminder that the fears attendant upon earthy living need not have the last word in defining one's life.

Jesus weaves a tapestry of claims about God around the tenuous thread of human existence. God is "your Father"; God's "good pleasure" is to give the kin-dom that is imperishable. These reminders of God's care and gracious protection, along with the promise of a new age to come, serve as antidotes to the very human problem of misplaced confidence, complacency, and fear of an uncertain future.

Given the number of reminders not to worry or be afraid that appear in the earlier passages of Luke 12 we've examined in previous weeks, the first hearers of this gospel message must have had reason to fear many things. What about us, about you? Are you afraid of being killed, Jesus asks? In verses 4 through 7 he tells us to remember that God is concerned with the hairs of your head. Are you worried about finding the right words to witness to your faith? In verses 8 through 12 he tells us to have confidence that the Holy Spirit will guide you. Does fear of an uncertain future cause you to disregard the needs of others and to stash your possessions? He reminds you that you can't take it with you in verses 13 through 21. Are you worried about your life, about food or clothing – or, one might add, about organic produce, designer shirts, stylish cars, a fat bank account, or any of the other outward signs that one has "made it" in the eyes of the world? At an even more basic level, are you afraid of starvation and destitution? In verses 22 through 31 Jesus tells us not to let our concern for these things turn us away from what is most important: striving for the kin-dom of God. It is not necessary to be anxious about life and death or about food and clothing. These are human means of protection and well-being, but they compare little with God's means. Worrying about them will not make a difference, in one's life or in one's death. That is pretty much the crux of the message.

How will worrying about them, or living in constant fear, make any difference? I know so

many people that watch their 401k or IRA's with an eagle eye, checking the stock market and how it affects their value daily. They get so upset and frustrated when the market takes a plunge. Yet what does that accomplish? Does it change the market or their investment value? Do they get any satisfaction out of the worry and fear? Is it anything they can realistically do anything about? Or is it one more thing to make life less enjoyable, one more distraction to keep them focused on themselves and away from striving from God's kin-dom drawing near? That doesn't mean that we don't seek to ensure we do what we can to provide for our needs, but that shouldn't consume us with worry and fear.

The message Jesus presents in this passage is that God's providence enables a response that runs counter to the human propensity to be afraid, a response that challenges the tendency to hold on to what one has, in order to protect against what might happen. Sell your possessions and give alms. We're to place our confidence in the imperishable things of the kin-dom rather than in the moth-eaten things in our own backyards. The passage challenges us with a simple test: Do we want to live lives of taking, or do we want to live lives of giving? The answers we give reveal the truth of our hearts and opens or closes us to the blessings that God is prepared to give.

The blessings offered, that today's lesson tells us to be prepared for, are known most fully by those who are no longer afraid of potential danger, darkness, and death, those who live the sort of lives that many cannot begin to embrace or comprehend. Human misconception encourages us to believe that giving, instead of taking, will lead to destitution, deprivation, and desperation.

The gospel promises, however, that giving from what we have will make us mindful of the God of blessing, and ready to receive the gifts that God offers. The less we want to have, the less we need to have. The less we need to have, the less we need to fear. The less we need to fear, the more we know that a life of giving allow us always to live, not on the brink of destruction, but on the brink of blessing, where we can more readily hear the promise that the "Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour," desiring not to punish but to bless. I hope and pray we choose lives that fear-less and are blessed more. Amen.

A Call to Serve

Luke 12:34 informs us, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Let our hearts direct the use of our resources, our time, and our talents. May our generosity meet God's abundance in attending to the needs and hopes of our community.

A Time for Reflection - *Musical Interlude*

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

We give in grateful thanksgiving for all that God has given us.
In the upside down world of the gospel,
we measure our wealth not by what we have,
but what we can give away.
Let us give away generously, in this offering,
To bless your church, your people, your creation.

Hymn

Great is thy Faithfulness

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Benediction

Live fearlessly in the abundance of God's treasure, confidently spreading the love and peace of Christ in the world to the glory of God. Amen.

Postlude