

Unfailing Treasure

Luke 12:32-40

8/11/2019

“Do not be afraid, little flock . . .”

What a timely message for this moment! We are a people on edge. Mass shootings. A highly charged political process. Environmental disasters and climate change impacts. We could generate a long list of reasons to be afraid. And yet, here we find these words from Jesus.

“Do not be afraid, little flock . . .”

Several commentators I read this week pointed out we might be tempted to hear the commands to remain alert and become even more anxious. Consider all the ways we are encouraged to be on alert already. Tornado and storm warnings – seek shelter. Shark warnings – stay out of the water. Flood warnings – move to higher ground. Food recalls – check everything in your fridge. Active shooter warnings – barricade, or flee, or fight!

These alerts get our adrenaline pumping, induce fear, and contribute to that anxiety level even if we only hear about these on the news without personal impact. It's impossible to live in this constant state of fear without there being significant long term emotional, mental, and physical damage. Is Jesus giving us another version of this? Are Christians called to be on a constant “imminent return of the messiah” alert? What is the appropriate response to this alert? Door to door evangelism? Daily checking news stories for signs of the tribulation? Nightly prayers, spending hours delineating all your possible sins, so Jesus won't be angry with you when he does come back?

“Do not be afraid, little flock . . .”

These words from Jesus speak directly to our fear and to that pervasive anxiety that we all feel creeping into our souls. And they tell us we need not become fearful and anxious about his return. Why should we not be afraid? Because God intends to give you an eternal kingdom and all its riches. We are promised an unfailing treasure.

Jesus paints a stunning picture. He describes servants who are prepared for the return of a master of the house. Upon his return, he rewards his waiting servants with a banquet. He makes them sit down and he proceeds to serve them the feast!

The popular images of Jesus' return often involve judgment and God's retribution raining down on humanity. This is a very different image of return. This is Jesus coming to take care of the faithful servants who have survived through all the fear inducing and anxiety producing circumstances of life and remained faithful. They are eagerly awaiting his return. And they will be rewarded with a feast that he will serve them!

So how are we to be ready and alert without becoming fearful and anxious? Most early Christians were poor. And yet, despite that Luke repeatedly includes challenges from Jesus to care for others who are poor. Don't be afraid. Instead be generous with everything you have. The response to all the fears that society would have us cringe before is to practice generosity. Take what you have and help others. Focus on relieving the fear and the anxiety in other people's lives. God is giving you an incredible gift, a kingdom filled with riches. Start sharing that kingdom and its treasure and your reward will grow!

How can we share this treasure? N.T. Wright describes it this way,

When (Jesus) speaks of 'treasure in heaven', here and elsewhere, this doesn't mean treasure that you will only possess after death. 'Heaven' is God's sphere of created reality, which, as the Lord's Prayer suggests, will one day colonize 'earth', our sphere, completely. What matters is that the kingdom of God is bringing the values and priorities of God himself to bear on the greed and anxiety of the world. Those who welcome Jesus and his kingdom-message must learn to abandon the latter and live by the former.¹

While Jesus uses the topic of money to catch our attention, he is referring to something much deeper. He is encouraging his followers to adopt the values and priorities of the God's eternal reign. When we adopt those, we find that earthly riches are much less important and heavenly priorities induce us to share what we have generously with others.

If we are doing this, we are waiting and watching for the savior. Our focus on loving others and on sharing generously is living into the priorities of God's reign. This is being dressed for action. This is having our lamps lit. This is what will please the master of the house when he comes.

I ran across a story this week which exemplifies this kind of generosity. It shows the kind of thing that happens when people learn how to live without fear. Peter W. Marty, publisher of the *Christian Century*, shared this story in a recent column.

Regifting can be a risky practice with all types of gifts except one—the kind we receive from God. When we share gifts or blessings that have been given to us by God, there's no end to the joy extended.

Besides time, money, or talent, there are other things of God that can be regifted. Bethany and Hannah Goralski are twin 25-year-old sisters who each donated a kidney to separate strangers earlier this year. Their dad died of kidney failure last year before they had the chance to donate to him. To honor his remarkable generosity with others, they elected to give life to someone else. Their decision triggered a chain reaction of anonymous kidney

¹ N.T. Wright, *New Testament for Everyone - New Testament for Everyone – Luke for Everyone*, Luke 12:13-34, 'The Parable of the Rich Fool.'

donations from friends of the people who benefited from their gift, and then from friends of others who had new life thanks to the succession of donors. In the end, Northwestern Memorial Hospital, in Chicago, helped coordinate ten donors and ten recipients, with potentially even more to come.²

The father's generosity inspired amazing generosity by the daughters. Their generosity inspired others in incredible ways.

Jesus is inviting us to regift these unfailing treasures in deliberate and sacrificial fashion. This is about far more than small kindnesses to strangers, although those are good things to do. No Jesus is calling us to be intentionally generous with what we have as an antidote to the fear and anxiety of the world. Our focus on generosity helps address the fears in our own lives. It helps heal our anxiety. Our sharing of God's kingdom with others helps them understand their fears and anxieties do not need to rule them.

Yes, this should involve our financial resources. It is not enough to say, "Be of good cheer," to someone who is suffering. We can resist the greed of our culture and do this. Christ Robertson expresses it well with these words, ". . . it's possible to approach one's life and one's belongings lightly and to see them for what they are, as gifts from God. This is where true freedom is found. When we invest our lives into others and choose to store up our treasure in heaven, everyone wins. Fear is replaced with love. Scarcity is replaced with abundance. And keeping up begins to make less sense. So as hard as it may be, it might be worth it to take Jesus seriously."³

And as we give from our material treasure, we can share other kinds of unfailing treasure.

We can act with humility by taking the time to understand someone's situation before we blunder in to "fix" their problems.

We can show compassion by listening first and speaking opinions later.

We can share wisdom by confessing the mistakes we have made and the hard path we walked in learning repentance.

We can give time by staying with those who suffer rather than running to the next appointment or event.

We can offer love by taking the time to form a friendship with those who are struggling.

There will be plenty of voices that will tell us these things are not worth our time just as those voices will tell us we shouldn't share our resources. Consider again the example of Bethany and Hannah who gave kidneys. That's the kind of regifting of our lives that Jesus is inviting us

² Peter W. Marty, <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/publisher/true-generosity-comes-joy>.

³ Chris Robertson, d365 (iPhone devotional app), August 10, 2019, "Be Brave".

to make. Jesus is inviting us to share the treasures of the kingdom, to show others the kind of love that Jesus showed us.

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.

Let us give the gifts of the kingdom we have been given and know that our unfailing treasure awaits in heaven. We can live without fear or anxiety and know that Jesus will reward us with a feast and an unfailing treasure. Amen.