

Sermon for August 10, 2025 – 10 a.m. Service
Given by Deacon Norah Fisher
Luke 12:32-40

"Don't be afraid." How many times have we heard those words in our lifetime? Our parents whispered them: Don't be afraid of: thunder, darkness, or branches scraping against the window. Don't be afraid of: striking out on the ball field, missing the ball on the tennis court, failing your physics exam, or your driver's test. When those words are spoken with love and sincerity, they can be some of the most soothing words we could ever hope to hear. "Don't be afraid, I'm here with you. You're going to be all right. I love you. Stop worrying. Don't be anxious." They are wonderful words when spoken by a loved one. I'm here ... "Don't be afraid."

Jesus says to his disciples "Do not be afraid." Besides our parents' voices, where have we heard those words before? In the Bible alone we hear them over fifty times from the Lord speaking to Abram in Genesis (15:1) to the book of Revelation (1:17) we hear them over and over. It seems to be one of God's favorite things to say to us: "Do not be afraid." In the verses right before our gospel passage this morning Jesus instructed his disciples not to worry about food or clothes; that they should consider how well God takes care of birds and flowers and grass and he tells them not to be anxious about such things but to "set [their] minds on [God's] kingdom and the rest will come to [them] as well" (12:31). If the disciples are going to continue to follow him they have no reason to worry about the things that they need. They are not to fret about their lives, their food, or their clothes. "Think," he says to them, "about how well God cares for the birds and the flowers and stop your worrying. Quit spending so much of your time fussing about these things. Instead," he says, "set your hearts on the kingdom and these other things will come along just fine."

Then, in the gospel for today, Jesus steps it up a notch. He repeats that they don't need to be afraid since it gives their Father great pleasure to hand over the kingdom to them. He goes on to say, "Sell what you have, give to those who need it more than you, and focus your lives on things that do not rot or wear out and can't be stolen. That's where you will find your treasure."

Deep down inside of me, in my less than stellar spiritual moments, I hear a voice that says if I give what I have to those in need then I might become one of those people in need. What then? ... who's going to take care of me then?

Can't you just hear Jesus now? "Haven't you been listening? I told you that God will take care of your needs. And since you won't have to be fussing around worrying about such things, you can attend to the work of the kingdom, which, in case you've forgotten, is breaking in as we speak."

Last week, we heard Jesus telling us the parable of the rich man who tore down his old, inadequate barns and built new ones to house his abundant crop. We get it. Don't hoard our goods, sell what we have, give to the poor; let our Father in heaven take care of us. We got that story. We understand what he's trying to tell us. But, honestly, we aren't too sure if we're ready to take that step. It's a big step. He understands.

There is a folktale about a king whose son was always sad no matter what his father did for him and no matter what good things happened to him. The king loved his son deeply and became so despondent that he vowed to do whatever was necessary to make his son happy and appreciative of all that he had. He called a meeting of his advisors and after much discussion and consultation (which got them nowhere), one of them, a very wise man, took the king aside and told him that the solution was to dress his son in the shirt of a man who was happy. If he found a truly happy man and gave this man's shirt to his son to wear, the son would be happy forever.

The king set out on a journey to find a man who was truly happy so that he might obtain his shirt and pass along this happiness to his son.

He entered a village and was told of a priest who was thought to be quite happy and content. The king found the priest and asked him if he would accept the position of bishop if it were given him. The priest quickly said, "Yes." The king thanked the priest but left at once, knowing that if the priest were truly happy and content with his life, he would not have wanted for more.

He traveled to a foreign country where he met another king and asked him what made him so happy. "Why," he said, "I have everything I could possibly want. But to tell you the truth," he went on, "I worry all the time that someone might come and take what I've worked so hard for." Again, the king saw that this was not a truly happy and content man.

Finally, he came upon a poor farmer working in a modest vineyard. He was singing and had the most beautiful smile. The king greeted him and asked what made him so happy. The man replied, spreading his arms out to display the vineyard, that he had everything he could possibly want. Then the king asked if he would come to the castle where he would never want for anything the rest of his life. The man refused, saying that there was nothing in the whole world that could make him happier nor take him away from his beloved farm.

The king was thrilled for at last he had found a truly happy man, and his son would be saved. He asked the man for a favor and was told that he would give the king anything he wanted. The king then asked him for his shirt to give to his son. The man opened up his jacket and the king saw that the truly happy, content man was not wearing a shirt.(1)

This is not unlike the story of the businessman visiting a beautiful tropical island and upon seeing a fisherman unloading a modest catch of fish asked him what he was going to do the rest of the day. "I will sit with my family, talk with my children, spend time with my wife, and cook supper."

The businessman told him that he ought to hire some men to help him.

"Why?" the fisherman asked.

"You could catch more fish," he replied.

"But why would I want to catch more fish?"

"So that you could make more money and buy more boats."

"But why do I need more boats?"

"So that you can have other people do your fishing for you."

"And why would I want to have other people do my fishing for me?"

"So that you could take time off, go to some exotic place for vacation, spend time with your wife and children ... oh!" and the businessman walked away reevaluating his own life while the fisherman took his catch to market and spent the rest of his day with his family.

Jesus said that where our treasure is there our hearts will be also. I believe he was talking about the fundamental orientation of our lives. What is most important to us? I used to repeat this saying backwards. It made more sense to me: where your *heart* is there your *treasure* will be also. I thought he was saying that our money would follow our heart's desires. Put your money where your heart is. I suppose

that, too, is true. But it's not what Jesus said. He was saying to us that the money goes toward something first and then our heart will follow.

These words have a special significance to the church I think. Get your life in order, rely on God for the things that you need, give yourself an attitude adjustment because Jesus is coming again and you darn well better be ready. We just don't know when. It has a lot more weight than the bumper sticker I saw a few years ago, "Jesus is coming back ... look busy." A better bumper sticker would read, "Jesus is coming, don't be afraid, sell what you have, give to the poor, put your wealth where you want your heart to be." That's closer to the point but I think that it's a bit too long to be read at 90 kilometers an hour. Amen.

1. Heather Forest, *Wisdom Tales* (Little Rock, Arkansas: August House, 1996), pp. 117-119. CSS Publishing Company, Sermons for Sundays after Pentecost (Middle Third): Where Would You Go To Meet Jesus?