

Luke 12.32-40

Do not be afraid little flock, for it is your Father's pleasure to give you the kingdom. vs 32.

Today's reading finds Jesus talking alternately with a large crowd and his small group of disciples (12.1, 13, 22).

Jesus' exhortation, "Do not be afraid little flock" was undoubtedly meant for this latter group.

But why might Jesus' disciples have been "afraid"?

Perhaps it was due to the ever growing threat of persecution from the religious leaders of the day (the Scribes and Pharisees) and from the civic authorities (the Romans).

Just a few moments previously (Luke 12.11) Jesus had warned the disciples that they would be dragged before "the synagogues, the rulers, and the authorities."

As John makes even more clear in his Gospel, from the earliest of days, Jesus had been on a collision course with the leaders of the Jewish nation (e.g. John 7.1, 10.31)

And Jesus warned his disciples that they would suffer the same persecution as he did (Matthew 10.24-25).

Perhaps the disciples were also fearful of how they were going to get by as they followed Jesus around during his itinerant ministry.

Many of them had left good jobs or family business for the uncertain life of disciples to a wandering rabbi.

Again, just a few moment earlier Jesus had felt the need to tell them not to worry about "what you will eat or about your body, what you will wear" (Luke 12.22).

Or perhaps the disciples were worried about the task ahead of them.

"Do not be afraid *little* flock" says Jesus.

How on earth was this tiny band of Jesus' disciples going to make an impact on the Jewish nation, let alone the vast and mighty Roman Empire and beyond?

The job was just too big; too overwhelming.

Fear is a most terrible of things, isn't it?

Whilst the managed fear of a horror film or fairground ride might give us a thrill, and a mild level of fear might stimulate us to action and achievement, few of us can say we enjoy being genuinely scared.

Constant low level fear can wear us down, stripping the enjoyment from life,

Whilst more serious fear can paralyse us like a rabbit caught in the headlights or prompt us to the wholly inappropriate action that comes from blind panic.

What are the things, I wonder, of which you are afraid?

Might it be, like the disciples, for your future security?

Or a fear of failure in the face of difficult challenges?

Might it be the fear of what others think of you? Especially if they discovered what you were really like behind your carefully managed public (Christian) image?

Maybe it's a fear for your children, or other family members who seem to have wandered from Christ?

Or maybe it's a fear that you will never be free from the bad habits and sins that you keep getting caught up in?

“Do not be afraid” says Jesus.

How come?

“Do not be afraid, little *flock*.”

The first grounds Jesus gives his disciples for not being afraid is that they belong to someone. They belong to God.

They are God's flock.

And as a shepherd would look after his sheep, protecting them from danger, feeding them, caring for their wounds and frailties, so God does for those who belong to him.

The flock may or may not be small, and the sheep might be frail and even stupid, but if the flock has God as its shepherd, it has all it needs.

You'll have all heard the phrase, “One plus God is always a majority”!

Numbers are not everything.

Being part of the flock of God is.

The second reason Jesus gives his disciples for not being afraid is that “it is God's pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

Now we could spend weeks exploring what this “kingdom” is, but let's for now just work with the idea that it is God's gracious and benevolent kingly rule.

So, not a geographic area, not a political system, but people being in a place where God is in control.

And because God perfectly loves the subjects of his kingdom, it's a place where people enjoy perfect love, joy, peace...

So note, Jesus tells his disciples not that they have to earn a place in God's perfect kingdom, and not that they have to build God's perfect kingdom.

But rather that God will give this kingdom to them.

More than that, he will give it to them joyfully, abundantly, and with a massive smile on his face.

It is his "good pleasure" to give it to them.

Imagine a father playing rugby with a group of boys.

So much bigger and stronger than anyone around him, the dad can pick the ball out of the mêlée and with a quick flick pass the ball to his son on the wing, who is free to run for his life and score in the corner.

So it is that God can take his kingdom and pass it to his children.

And his children do not need to fear the big boys around them, when they have the Father on their side.

So, how might this verse of Scripture help us today?

Well, back to those fears that plague us – and let's face it, we all have them in some form or another.

The good news of Christianity is that we do not face them on our own, and we can overcome them.

As Christians we are part of the same "little flock" that the disciples were.

And Jesus is our shepherd.

The one who guards us, who provides for us, and who heals our hurts and wounds.

And, as Christians, Jesus is pleased – pleased - to give us the kingdom.

The kingdom in the sense of a place under Jesus' benevolent kingly rule, and the kingdom in the sense that he will build his kingdom in and through us.

Let me remind you of some other Scripture verses, verses you all know:

Isaiah 43.1-2:

"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you walk through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers they will not overwhelm you."

Matthew 6.31-33:

"Do not worry, saying, 'what will we drink?' or 'what will we wear?' For it is the Gentiles that strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well."

1 John 4.18:

“Perfect love casts out fear.”

Why do I read you these verses again? Verses that you all know so well?

Well, it’s because we all forget.

Faced with the things that worry or scare us; the things that make us afraid; we lose sight of the reality of God’s promises.

And like a large shadow cast by a small object the fear we feel becomes much bigger, much more real than the promises of God.

We need to remind ourselves regularly of God’s promises.

Forcing ourselves to listen to them, to reckon with them; choosing to believe that actually God and the promises he makes are bigger and more powerful than any fear we might have – putting things back in a right perspective.

Cramner knew he was doing when he wrote the 1662 Prayer Book. Each week after the Confession comes the Comfortable words – words of scripture that remind us of the promise of God to forgive all who truly turn to him in repentance.

Where we struggle to believe these promises of God, we need to come before God and pray for the gift of his Spirit to convince us of their truth; maybe even asking someone else to pray for us.

After all, didn’t Jesus himself say, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth” (John 16.13)?

Life is hard enough as it is.

Being a Christian does not guarantee us freedom from life’s troubles (at least not in this world), but let me urge you, don’t live a life of worry on your own.

Come to Jesus. Believe his promises.

Allow Jesus to set you free.

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