

August 11, 2019

Don't Be Afraid

Throughout the gospels, we have moments when Jesus is addressing his disciples that same very intimate as though he is trying to tell his closest followers of his, something that is vastly important that he wants them to grasp so that they have that during the time when he is no longer with them, something to hold on to and to remember. I think that the passage from Luke this morning is one of those moments, and especially that the first line when he says to his disciples do not be afraid, little flock. That's just seems very endearing to me. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your heavenly Father it is his good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Don't worry about it. Don't be afraid of missing out or losing out because this is the promise of God. This is something that you have been chosen for. This is the gift that God chooses to give, so don't be afraid.

Now he goes on to tell them other things, create for yourselves versus the don't wear out that your treasure is where your heart is. I've got really stuck on that first line, do not be afraid. A lot of times throughout my ministry, and you have to remember I've been doing this for quite a while now, 30 plus years now, and the greatest fear that I have seen in church members is the fear that I'm not doing enough, the fear that I'm not good enough, the fear that I haven't accomplished enough to warrant the gift that God has chosen to give.

From time to time what I've wanted to say is, "Well, if you think you haven't done enough, then you probably have. If you think you're not worthy, you probably are, and you probably need to work harder and become worthy." Now I've never said that to anybody in response to that fear, although it kind of felt good to say it right then. The truth is what God says to you is don't be afraid of that. Don't be afraid of losing the gift. The gift is given, the gift you have received. It's not about what you do, how much you do, or if you believe the right thing, or you do the right thing all the time. That I hope gives you some comfort.

Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. It's yours, stop worrying about it. Live it. Let it be your reality. Let it be the thing that shows you how to live your life. Get away from this idea that it's all about this commandment or that commandment, this rule or that rule, and start thinking about it as though, how do I be kind in this world? How do I find the way with all the things in the world to fear? Do not be afraid to live out being the truth that I know. That's what it's really about.

What is the truth that you know? The truth that I know is that God is. God is real. God is creator. God has shown love for humanity from the very beginning of time. Even when humanity chose to try the boundaries and defy God, God said, "Okay, we've gotten past this now." You know that you can say no. Now you know that you can also say yes. You can say, "I love you, Beth," because just because you broke away does not mean I stopped loving you. I still love you. I still care for you. I want the very best for you, and I'm going to bring you along

and bring you along. I'm going to give you some rules to follow. You're not going to be able to follow very well, but you'll learn it, right?

I'm going to bring you along and along and you're going to see what the consequences are when you choose not to follow. You need to know those, too. We have learned those lessons. We've seen those lessons. They're not very pleasant in the Old Testament, but I'm not going to stop there. I'm going to come to you. I'm going to embrace you and I'm going to embrace your humanity. I'm going to join with you and I'm going to embrace you and I'm going to teach you. I'm going to show you the love that humanity can have for humanity and that humanity can have for God. That's your reality in Jesus.

We see where humanity and divinity had come together and what that can look like, what that can be like going through life, being confronted and still being forgiven, being rejected and so being kind. That's what Jesus showed us. In his suffering and in his resurrection, he has shown us that nothing could separate us from the love of God. Even taking God incarnate and placing him on a cross and ending that life did not stop God from loving us. All God says is, "I want you to love me back."

I want you to be able to get beyond the things that divide you as human beings and learn to love each other, to be kind to one another, to be fair with one another, to fight against the injustices that human beings are capable of. I want you to learn what it is to be godlike and to forgive, what it is to be like God into love in spite of the failures and the defiance and to do that and not be afraid.

In the world today, there's so much more to be afraid of. I never thought I would live to see the day when my wife or friends would say to me, "It's scaring so I'm afraid to go to the store. I'm afraid to go to places with large crowds. I'm afraid to go to school because you just don't know what's going to happen." I don't have an answer for that because it is a reality. Yet I hear Jesus speak to his disciples and say, "Don't be afraid." That's the message that we have to share with one another and share with our children who see these news stories, who see the reality around them. We need to tell them, and especially our children, don't be afraid.

Yes there are bad things out there. Yes there are bad things that can happen, but you are in the hands of God, and that doesn't mean a bad thing will happen. It simply means that you simply won't be taken away from God in any way, shape, or form. Then as you live a life of faith where you truly believe the truth of who God is and what God has done, when you live that truth as you see your classmates, and you see them in a way where you recognize not threat but isolation and you are able to go beyond your group and say, "It's okay. Don't be afraid. Don't be lost. We're all in this together."

Now when I... We'd go back to school each year. There was always that little bit of excitement but also fear about where exactly I was going to fit in to the great scheme of things in my class. Quite frankly, I never did fit very well in the great scheme of things in my class but always found the place. Being one of the misfits, we kind of took in all the other misfits. We found ways to

say, "You're okay because none of us are really okay, and that makes you fit in with us just fine."

We need to help teach our children that living a life of faith is to see the others and to accept them for who they are. Then if you feel hate, you need to identify exactly what that is in that individual. Jesus said hate what is evil, love what is good. He never said hate who is evil. He never said hate who is evil. We need to teach our children that love can overcome evil and hatred.

As we get ready to start this new school year, it's a time to remind them that they are living a life of faith, living a life of hope, and living a life of promise that won't be taken away. As we show them that love of God, as we show them that love of church, as we show them that love of family, then maybe they can step beyond their fears of those who are different and step beyond their fears that what some have said you should hate this and find a way to embrace those who are different, make them part of the group.

We hear in Hebrews that the life of faith is held up in the life of Abraham. He knew God. He believed God. He trusted God. Lay them all over the world it seemed like, held that promise out in front of him for all that time he never was quite sure exactly how or when that was going to take place. Every once in a while you have a little talk with God. I've been doing this for a while now. You sent me here, you sent me there. You've promised me ancestors. I've got no children of my own. Any time now would be great.

Sometimes I think we're in that same kind of mode where we're saying, "You've promised me the kingdom, but I don't see it around me." Any time would be nice now. I have the sense of God saying, "Yes, I promise that to you and it's not around you, but it's in you." You make it the reality. You make your life that place where the Kingdom of God is real for yourself, for your family, for those who are around you. That's our call. That's what it is to be the church, to take that reality of God's kingdom, what we know and accept the love of God and respond to that call to share it with God's world.

May we take the opportunity to share that with our children, our grandchildren, with one another where we hold back the fears, push them away, open our arms to those who are even more afraid than we are. Invite them to come and know another way, a way of hope, a way of promise, a way of peace at least inner peace so that the fears can be pushed away. We live a life that makes the reality of God's kingdom real even if it's only for a moment, even if it's only in a very small space, real and an invitation to all.

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