

Pentecost 12 [Pr 14] 8/7/16
St. Luke 12:22-34 C

“FEAR NOT, LITTLE FLOCK, FOR IT IS YOUR FATHER’S GOOD PLEASURE TO GIVE YOU THE KINGDOM.”

“I’m but a stranger here, Heav’n is my home,” we sing. But, is it easier to sing, than to believe it?

The Christian life is the life of daily tension. Life under the cross means that our citizenship is in heaven, but yet, today we live on this side of heaven. And, that means we have cares and concerns for this day -- shelter from the sun and the snow; food, drink, & clothing for our bodies; health; faithful and loving family and friends. As you live as a citizen of heaven, yet today, does that tension just press in upon you? Do the care and concerns of life in this world make you forget that God has promised to open His hand to give you all that you need for our body and life?

In our Old Testament reading for this Sunday, we see Father Abraham, the father of all Christian people, forgetting that God has promised to take care of him.

The Lord God had richly blessed Abram, as he was first known in the Bible, in every way. The Lord God called Abram away from his homeland and made him a promise, saying,

Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing...and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Ge 12).

God blessed Abram with material possessions, livestock, and silver and gold.

Yet despite all of his blessings and his prosperity and his comforts, Abram feared. Did you catch the first words God spoke to Abram in our Old Testament lesson? “Fear not!” In spite of all the blessings the open hand of God had poured out on Abram, he was walking by fear instead of faith.

Abram’s great fear was that he had no son, no heir. Look at his response to God’s words, “what will you give me, for I continue childless?” If he had a son, he could face old age without fear, knowing he had someone to take care of him.

But, much more than that, Abram wondered that without a son, an heir, would the promised Messiah ever come to save him from sin, death, and hell? Remember that when God first appeared to him and told him to go to the land of Canaan, the Lord God promised Abram that that “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Ge 12). Abram understood this promise of God. He understood that the promised Savior would come from his family line. But, how could that line continue, how could the Messiah come through Abram, if he had no son?

Abram doubted God, and doubt is unbelief. Abram already had the promise from God Himself of earthly wealth and land and a Savior to come from his own offspring. But, Abram, in his sinful weakness, needed continual assurance. He needed to be reminded again and again of God’s promises. So, God comes again to him in our lesson, “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” And, God reminded him that a son from his own body would be his heir and through that son, the Messianic line would continue so that Abram’s descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky.

Do you ever doubt? Do the cares and concerns of today ever make you forget God's promises?

Yes, our citizenship in heaven, but, in the weakness of our mortal nature, we worry over the things of today. No matter how God has blessed us in the past, no matter how much God has opened His hand to bless us with today, we worry, worry, worry. And, that is a sin. Rather than fear, love, and trusting in God above all things, we seek security, peace, joy, meaning, and purpose in the treasures of this world.

Experts continue to tell us that the # 1 source of strife and trouble in marriage is ... money.

In 2015, Americans spent \$ 70.15 billion – that's "billion" with a "b" – on lottery tickets. To put that another way, that means an average of \$ 219 per American citizen, man, woman, and child, was spent on lottery tickets.

How big is the pornography industry? The pornography industry makes more money than the revenue of Microsoft, Google, Amazon, eBay, Yahoo!, Apple, and Netflix COMBINED.

The Olympics started this week. And, if you have followed any of the news regarding the Olympic games, you know that many of the Russian athletes have been banned from the games because of illegal doping. That's right, maybe they made them run a fraction of a second faster to win, but they also made them much more inclined to cancer, tumors, and other horrible side effects. And by the way, this was state-sponsored cheating by the Russian government.

"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." No matter what that treasure is -- money, land, sex, food, gold medals, popularity -- there your heart will be also. And, when we love the things of this world

more than Jesus, when we turn our heart from treasuring Christ above all things, we end up like Abram, walking by fear.

But faith hears the voice of Jesus, “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Did you catch the words of Jesus? “**Give.**” God gives us eternal life in the kingdom of heaven as a gift.

God kept His promise. Through Abram, all peoples on earth were indeed blessed. Isaac was born and, through him, God sent a greater Son – Jesus. God opened His hand to give us that which we need most -- a Savior who is Christ the Lord!

Fear rises from distrust. The root of all of our sin is doubt. We doubt God. So, Jesus was born and took all of our doubt, our worry, our fear, our love of this world and its stuff, and went to the cross, to shed His blood so that we would be forgiven.

Like Abram, God has called each one of us. In the new birth of our baptism, God has called us out of that old and pagan land of sin and worry and fear and doubt to a new land, a land filled with the fruit of the Gospel. In that washing of regeneration and new birth, God the Holy Spirit drowns our flesh with its love of worldly pleasures and property and works faith in us, so that we walk by faith.

And yet, even as we walk by faith, in a sinful world, with Satan whispering in our ear, fear remains. God spoke promises to Abram, and despite those promises Abram still feared, still doubted. God has likewise spoken to us, and despite these promises we still fear, we still doubt.

What sort of fears do you continually suffer? Is your conscience terrorized by memories of past sin? Does Satan continually attack your weakness? Do you fear losing your possessions? Do you fear being left

destitute and penniless? Do you fear illness or the infirmity of old age? Do you fear death?

The Good News of the Christian faith is that God loves you as He loves Abram. Abram had already heard the word and promise of God, that an entire nation would come from Abram, and that all peoples on earth will be blessed through him. When Abram needed constant reassurance, God gave it! "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." In the same way, God continually speaks His Word to in the forgiveness of your sins, and in His own life-giving Body and Blood. Against your fears and your worry and your unbelief, God gives you, His holy people, the same comforting message of reassurance He gave Abram: "Fear not, Dear Christian. I am your shield," says the Lord your God, "your reward shall be very great."