

When our oldest daughter, Abby, was about 17, still living at home and a new driver, she called home late one night and without another word blurted out, “I’m all right!” Nothing makes you panic like those words coming out of the blue, “I’m all right.” My response was probably what yours has been in a similar situation: “What happened?” No one says, “I’m all right” out of the blue unless something bad has happened! Turned out Abby was in a car accident, but she wasn’t hurt. No one was hurt. She had learned a powerful lesson cheaply.

So, when Jesus says out of the blue, ““Don’t be afraid, little flock.” We can rest assured he says that **not** because there is **nothing to fear**. You don’t have to reassure people that they are safe when there is no threat to their safety. When people are safe and they **feel** safe they’re thinking about other things. They’re thinking about what to make for dinner, or what they’ll wear to school the next day, or what they’ll do on the weekend. But, when you are fearful, when there is really something to fear, or even when you just think there **might** be something to fear, that’s when we need reassurance that everything will be ok.

Jesus knows full well all that the disciples have to fear. The source of their fear is standing all around them: the people who don’t like it that Jesus is going around healing people, and feeding people, giving people hope that their life of desperation and hardship is not God’s judgment on them. They fear exactly what **will happen** – that Jesus insisting that being included in God’s kingdom does not depend on them submitting to Caesar but on their opening their hands to receive what God longs to give them: abundant life and peace and the community of siblings to bear life’s joys and sorrows with – the disciples fear that **all of that** will make the religious establishment and the powerful empire angry and that that anger will then turn on Jesus and them and there will be hell to pay!

That’s what they fear and those of us who know the rest of the story know they had good reason to be afraid. They’re worst fears became reality. And **Jesus** knows the rest of the story too. Jesus knows that institutions with power and empires with power will do whatever it takes to hold on to that power – even resorting to violence; even pitting one group against another fanning the flames of fear until the powerful don’t even **need** to take action. The fear that people feel for each other will keep them from seeing the humanity they hold in common. The fear they feel will move them to see each other as the enemy; as subhuman, maybe; it may even allow them to look away as innocent people are hurt or killed. So, Jesus gently, tenderly invites us **not** to fear; but instead, to put our treasure, our lives not in cages of fear but at the banquet table of real, abundant life.

There is plenty to fear. Our world holds **real** dangers and lest we think it’s all just perception, that things really aren’t any worse now than they’ve ever been, I refer you to the U.N. nations report on climate change, written by the most trustworthy climate scientists who say we have 12 years to turn this whole massive climate mess around. And that’s just to avoid the **worst**-case scenario. There will be serious consequences, no matter what. We’re already seeing some of

those. But we have 12 years to prevent the worst case from becoming reality. That has never happened before in human history.

Every generation has lived with fears; some more dramatic than others. It's not a contest.

But every generation has a choice. Do we put our treasure, our money, our lives, our hopes and our future and our children's future in the hands of the kingdom of fear? Or do we put our treasure – all that we truly hold dear in God's hands, at the banquet table that God has prepared for us?

Jesus wants us to know just who it is that we are trusting when we do that. If we're going to be able to trust in God, we need to know **who** this God is. Jesus does not ask us to trust just any god and there were plenty of them to choose from in the Roman empire just as there are plenty of idols we can give our lives to in this day. Jesus wants us to know what our commitment to **this** God means?

So, in the reading from Luke Jesus makes two remarkable statements about God.

1. That the God Jesus invites us to trust is not some petty king who's scrutinizing our every action and thought to see if it measures up to God's standards. God's kingdom, God's love, everything good is **already** ours; God has **already** extended the invitation, made a place for us at the table. It only awaits our RSVP. We have **only** to show up.
2. God is so **eager** to give us all good things; eager to include us in the kingdom; so that if you accept the invitation, God puts on an apron, sits you down as guest of honor at the table and serves YOU. The host of the feast, the author of life, is eager to serve YOU. That is remarkable!

That's the shape of God's kingdom – where the strong show their strength by serving the weak, the powerful exercise their power by waiting on the powerless, and hope is found in caring for the hopeless – that is the kingdom of God that Jesus wants us to know. That is the **God** that Jesus wants us to trust.

Jesus says that this kingdom, this life in God with all those others who have taken a chance on this God, this kingdom is like a banquet where **God** is anxious to **serve us**. And the only catch is that we can only **perceive** this kingdom when we are eagerly, alertly awaiting God's arrival in every moment.

We have to be eagerly awaiting God at all times because that's how we'll recognize God in our midst. When we are looking for God, we'll find God. When our treasure is already with God, then our hearts can follow. Because that's how human beings work. We entrust our 'treasure' to God or to people or to things and then our hearts follow. Not the other way around.

Did you ever see one of those old movies where someone is chasing a train, trying to get on? They're always carrying a bag and they can't jump on while they're still holding onto that bag. The bag, of course, holds what they treasure. It could be money or just a few clothes. But, it's precious to them. So, before they can jump on the train, they have to let go of the bag. So they throw the bag on the train **first**. **Then they** jump on the train. Heart follows treasure.

What we **do** with the treasure God has given us will **determine** where our heart will end up. Not the other way around.

When Jesus says "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also," he is saying that we can train ourselves through the use of our money, through the way we spend our time and our talents. If we spend all our money on ourselves – that's where our heart will be – trapped in this one little life. But, when we give our money, our time, our efforts where God has always told us they should go - to the lost and the least, the marginalized and the oppressed – when we put our treasure with them we will find God as well.

One commentator says, "There is a sacramental quality to charity, in which God becomes present to givers **through those** who receive and need their gifts.' Which is just a fancy way of saying, "I was hungry and you fed me. I was thirsty and you gave me water. I was a stranger and you welcomed me." Jesus promised to be found in the marginalized and the desperate so of course when we throw our lot in with them, our hearts follow and in the mix we find ourselves at the feast of all creation – which is the kingdom of God. THAT is what 'being ready' means. That is what Jesus means by 'being alert'. Be on the look out for God who is already in your midst.

In his book [*Money and Possessions*](#), Walter Brueggemann says that the dominant economy of our culture and every modern culture is 'grounded in fear.' He says, "The mantra of scarcity tells us that we do not yet have enough. We have not yet done enough. We are not enough! Television ads remind us that we do not yet have the product that will make us secure and happy . . . not yet. The antidote to such driven-ness is to disengage from such an ideology" (193-194).

That's what Jesus is saying, "disengage from the culture's creed that tells you that you are not enough, oh, and by the way, you'll never BE enough!" And when you disengage from that culture (or we could say, when you quit worshipping the god that is the culture) you will RECEIVE as free gift that it is God's good pleasure to give you – the kingdom in which we all belong to each other.

When we let go of our possessions and give the money to those in need, we're opting out of the system that says, our money, our possessions, our status, determine our value and that **no one's** money, possessions or status **or lack of them** determines their value. We opt out of the anxiety of that system all together.

Last week I asked you to risk being brave with me so that we could honestly, fearlessly name our idols out loud; so that we could each imagine and name those things that had taken God's place

in our lives and in the life of our culture. Not because we are evil. But, because we are human and humans will always find something to worship. I asked you to risk being brave with me but really it isn't **me** asking you to be brave. Jesus is asking us **all** to be brave – that's what he's saying when he says "Be not afraid." He's telling you that:

God adores you. God longs to give you all the **truly** good things in life: love, family, belonging, purpose, hope. They are already ours. All we have to do is open our clenched fists and receive them. And Jesus even tells us **how** to do that. He gives us the formula: "Sell our possessions and give to those in need." We have to be brave to hear that as invitation to a spacious, heart-wide-open life. That takes bravery to see that as possibility and not threat.

Jesus isn't inviting us to be more charitable or to create a world where some people survive because more privileged people choose to be generous sometimes. What Jesus offers is much more radical, because it gets at the heart of the matter. Jesus want us, his followers, to depend on him so completely that it overturns the whole world order. Jesus wants a new and different world – a new kingdom.

With Jesus, that kingdom has arrived. If the "kingdom of God is among [us]", then that kingdom, that reality has put an end to all the old ways of power and privilege. That kingdom has begun and we're invited to be brave; to open our clenched fists and our let God soften our hardened hearts so that we can begin to share in God's kingdom together.

Like I said last week, this is no easier for me than it is for you. I don't know what this means for me here and now or for us. But we belong to each other and Jesus is calling us to be brave together.

So, we begin by being honest and by taking whatever first steps are before us. We can gather to talk about what care of creation looks like here and now – we'll meet Sunday right after worship to do just that. We gather with our Outreach team to dream big about ending homelessness here in Aberdeen. We gather with our siblings here getting to know each other really well so that we can trust each other with these difficult challenges. We celebrate with the whole ELCA across the country in the decision to become a 'sanctuary' denomination aligning ourselves with the immigrant and the refugee and the asylum seeker and we figure out together what that looks like here among us. We celebrate with the ELCA across the country in apologizing to African Americans for our part in slavery and commit to repairing the damage of racism. We celebrate 50 years of women in ordained ministry in the ELCA and 40 years of women of color in ordained ministry and 10 years of LGBTQ people in committed relationships in ordained ministry as we continue to discern who is being left out and how we can better make it known that the doors to God's kingdom are wide open to everyone.

We do all these things while continuing to seriously consider in our own hearts and together in conversation, what is it that Jesus is asking of us in saying, "Sell your possessions and give to those in need." Jesus offers us the whole ball of wax, the whole kingdom. We get to choose

whether we will put our treasure, our money, our lives, our hopes and our future and our children's future in the hands of the kingdom of fear? Or will we entrust all that we hold truly dear to God's hands, at the banquet table that God has prepared for us all?

Pastor Val Metropoulos
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church
Aberdeen WA