

*August 7, 2016*

*St. Luke 12:22-34: **"Fear Not, Little Flock!"***

*Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Years ago I told a story about a pastor who was walking to church on a beautiful Sunday morning. It was in the days when horses were the main method of transportation. As the pastor was walking, he saw a young man that he happened to know as an acquaintance. The young man, who was full of life, came out of the local inn, mounted his horse, and looked at the pastor with a disrespectful grin. "Can you tell me Pastor," said the young man with amusement, "how far is it to hell?" Shocked by the question, the pastor sharply replied, "It is not far off. You may come to it sooner than you expect." The young man laughed, put the spurs to his horse, and was soon out of sight.

As the young man rode away, the pastor continued his walk to the church. After turning the corner, he saw a large crowd of people in front of him. Making his way through the large crowd of people, he saw with his own eyes the reason for all the commotion. There, on the ground, was the young man to whom he had just spoken the words of warning. He was dead. His horse had become uncontrollable and had thrown him to the ground so that he had unfortunately landed on his head.

The dictionary defines the word "destination" as "the place to which someone or something is going or being sent." The young man was not too concerned about his destination. This hard hitting account reminds us that it can all end in a brief moment. Have we given adequate consideration to our destination, or are we distracted by . . . you name it?

A couple of Sundays ago, our Gospel lesson was about the *Parable of the Rich Fool* which proceeds our text for this morning. It is rather difficult to understand our lesson for this morning without keeping it in mind.

And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'" But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God (Luke 12:16-21)."

You might recall what I said about what it means to be "rich toward God." I said: "To be rich toward God means to believe that there is nothing greater than to have God. When we look at Jesus and all that he has done for us, we come to the realization that nothing we desire can compare to having him and all that he gives." I also quoted Psalm 73:25, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you." Our destination is to have God in Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God. To have him is to have all that one can possibly have.

Jesus says to his disciples in our Gospel lesson: "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body

more than clothing . . . For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.” Indeed! “Seek his kingdom.” And, to seek his kingdom is to ultimately have the King, for there is no kingdom without him who gives and rules all things for the good of his kingdom. As it says in Psalm 73:26, “My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” And Paul writes of Jesus that by him all things were created, “all things were created through him and for him . . . he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross (Col. 1:15-20).”

He who made us and has redeemed us by his blood is our Shepherd who is Good and who feeds and leads us to all that is Good. Because we have Christ and the forgiveness of sins, we will not allow earthly possessions to become a wall that separates us from our relationship with God and our neighbor. As Jesus says, “For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.” Life is about our destination that God has in mind for us from the foundation of the world. Everything of the creation is to be defined in the context of the one who made it all - who was, is, and is to come. We are to understand the creation in the context of the peace and salvation that we have undeservedly received from God through the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ. Our fall into sin, which would have prevented us from reaching our destination, has been washed away by the blood of Christ, so that we might reach the kingdom of heaven. All things must serve our reaching the face of our Lord and Savior.

Since God promises to use all things to that end, the apostle Paul is able to say, “. . . I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me (Phil. 4:11-13).” Paul understands that when we are in Jesus, there is no reason for us to set our hearts on what is down here. We work and learn much in this life to prepare us for the destination, but there is no reason to be anxious about the moment when forever is ours. We live in Jesus who is our all in all. And since we are the children of God in Christ, we have a Father who knows what we need and takes care of us in such a way as to reach our destination.

God knows what is best for us in the course of this life. His timing is the perfect timing and his decisions and untraceable paths are always for our salvation. In Christ, where we see the gracious will and care of the Father, we are taught to completely recline ourselves into his hands trusting that he really does know what is best. That means that every detail, from the smallest to the greatest, we leave up to him. We do what he has given us to do, we do not become lazy, but cast all of our anxieties upon him because we really do believe that he cares for us. It is in that belief that we are able to say in all things, “thy will be done!” for we believe that his ultimate will for us is that we are with him in the heaven.

Ultimately, it's not just our thoughts that need to be redirected to bring an end to the anxieties and worries that plagues us; it's the direction and focus of our hearts. The Holy Spirit focuses our hearts on Jesus and encourages us to be certain that having him is to truly have it all. Paul writes: “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you . . . (Col. 3:1-5)."

When we believe in what we have in Jesus and all that is to come, our anxieties and worries recede. Our priorities are changed. No long is life to get stuff, but to be with Jesus and our final destination. This sense of mission is even strengthened as our Lord promises to take care of us with all that we really need to get us home. The same concept is in our Gospel lesson when Jesus says: "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Luke 12:32-34)."

I did not see the movie, but I read that in *The Usual Suspects* (1995) that a bad guy by the name of Keyser Soze comes home to find his wife and kids taken hostage by a rival bad guy with the threat that unless he yields control to his competition, his wife and kids will die. His solution? He whips out his gun and kills his own wife and kids so that no one will have any leverage on him. You can hardly get more ruthless than that. Though murdering your family is hardly the thing that anyone should do, the thought is similar to our Lord's principle - take the very thing that you are anxious and worried about and get rid of it, put it to death, give it away. When we believe that our destination in Christ is more important than anything else, whatever attempts to get in the way no longer has control over you and frees you to be focused on that which will never perish, spoil, or fade away. Therefore, we face everyday unafraid. We "fear not" for the Father has given us the kingdom!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott