

“Kingdom Anxiety” – Communion Sunday – August 7, 2016 (Luke 12:32-40)
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You know, when Michelle and Larry join forces, I always find myself moved in two directions. The first is to say, “Amen,” and end the service right there. “We don’t need a sermon today because we just did church!” The second is to feel compelled to preach the best sermon I have in me, because it’s the only way to stand up here, with your music still echoing around this sanctuary, and to honor the beauty of what you’ve just done – to speak to the presence of the Spirit made known to us in this moment. So, I’m going to give this a shot, and if I fail miserably, it’s not for lack of inspiration... Trust me...

“We expect you... anytime, anytime... We expect you...”

This expectation should be a wonderful thing – an exciting thing. It should be an expectation – an openness – to God’s Kingdom manifesting itself in our lives. It’s the expectation that keeps hope alive and joy ever-present. There’s a playfulness in Jesus words: “Do not be afraid, little flock.”

Sometimes I look at the history of the Christian church and wonder when that expectation turned to apprehension. Maybe it was the moment we began to talk about the Kingdom of Heaven as something out there, beyond us, that only some people... the RIGHT people were allowed to enter – a place we could only go after we’d lived our lives; *and* a place we could only go if we’d lived our lives *just right*.

I think at some point along the way we Christians started suffering from a certain condition that has changed the way we understand exactly what Jesus meant for the Kingdom to be. It’s a condition that makes us believe we have to act in a certain way because there will be *penalties* for us as individuals – instead of acting in a certain way

because it will make the whole world a better place. It's a condition that can make us more concerned about the future of things, instead of the present reality of things. It's a condition that can make us focus on Jesus exclusively as the only way to God, instead of focusing on our neighbors as the very representations of Jesus in our midst.

I think it's a condition we might call "Kingdom Anxiety." I don't say that to be flip; I say it as someone plagued by anxiety – as someone who knows the pervasive nature of anxiety quite intimately.

Kingdom Anxiety might make us focus on our passage this morning as a warning: "Keep your lamps lit; be dressed and ready..." And Kingdom Anxiety might prevent us from recognizing that the very first words of the passage are, "Fear not, little flock, for it has pleased God to give you the kingdom."

Fear not.

Kingdom Anxiety makes us respond to passages like this with notions like the one written on a little button I used to have: "Jesus is coming! Look busy!" Kingdom Anxiety prevents us from recognizing the ways that Jesus is *already* present in our very midst when we welcome the stranger, clothe those left in the cold, and feed the hungry. We remember that *this* is why the lamps stay lit; *this* is why the food remains prepared. Because the kingdom is open and it's ready for welcome, and we are called to be its caretakers.

I can't read these verses without thinking about another time Jesus talks about the Kingdom in Luke's gospel. He's asked by some religious leaders *when* the Kingdom of God was arriving, and he responds: "The kingdom is *not coming* in things that can be

observed... Some might say, 'There it is,' or 'There it is over there,' but I tell you that the kingdom is among you – it is already within you.”

The kingdom of God is among *you*; it is *within you*.

Listen again to the opening verse of today’s passage: “Fear not, do not be afraid, little flock, for *it has pleased* your God to give you the kingdom.”

“*It has pleased...*” Jesus speaks of an ever-present moment – not of what’s to come, but of what we already have.

If there is any future expectancy that should compel us to act in a certain way, then it’s an expectancy that comes from what’s still left to do to make the kingdom here and now. The idea that we keep the lamps lit and the food prepared is to hold fast to the light of the world and to keep our neighbors fed.

That’s a kingdom worth striving for; a kingdom worth living for.

Unfortunately, kingdom anxiety tends to lead Christians to judge who will *eventually* get in to heaven and who is kept out. It leads to defamation and condemnation. Condemnation leads us to the very opposite of heaven on earth. When we condemn others, we don’t make Earth a heaven for the living. Instead we make it a living hell.

It’s Kingdom Anxiety.

Now maybe we already try to make heaven on Earth for ourselves – we try to make ourselves happy by surrounding ourselves with things – with stuff – as Pastor Patricia talked about last week. I can’t help but wonder if we perpetuate the anxiety by claiming a false sense of satisfaction with the sheer amount of stuff clogging our lives.

If we release ourselves from that need for stuff, then we release ourselves from the bonds it has over us. Most of it is stuff that just increases our anxiety, anyway.

A few weeks ago I was so excited because I got a new, fire engine red, Kitchenaid mixer. All I could think about was all the stuff I'd make with that mixer. Now I have it, and I barely use it because I don't want to have to clean the thing and all the parts it comes with! So there it sits on our kitchen counter, and there I stand next to it – mixing my next batch of zucchini bread by hand!

[Mixing] “That sure is a pretty mixer!” [Still mixing] “Sure is making my life easier!”

Maybe if we're not focused on these material things – on these empty treasures – maybe if we're not consumed with being consumers, then the section of this morning's scripture about the thief in the night would seem a little less like a warning. We can release ourselves from the anxiety of the thief in the night if we recognize that the things that might be stolen are just things.

Maybe the point is that releasing ourselves of that anxiety (– and perhaps some of the things –) means that we can focus on the joyful hopeful expectation of a kingdom where our actual treasure is one another – the very richest gifts in the world. A treasure that is one another, is a treasure worth focusing on; a treasure that's worthy of the kingdom of heaven. What if – every time we paused in the worship service for welcoming *one another* – what if we recognized *that* as an opportunity to acknowledge our true treasure, our greatest gifts.

A kingdom come *on earth*... as if it were heaven.

What does God ultimately treasure?

Can that treasure be stolen?

What does God ultimately treasure?

“Fear not, little flock, for it has pleased God to give you the kingdom.”

How do we care for our truest treasure? We allow ourselves to experience the treasure that is one another. We say with hope and joy: “We expect you... anytime... anytime... we expect you.”

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Phil always begins our personnel commission meetings with a reflection. This past week he played a TedTalk for us, which was offered by David Brooks – the New York Times op-ed columnist. Brooks encouraged his audience to ask themselves this question: “What if we lived for what will be spoken during our eulogy, not what will be written on our resume?”

So I wonder: What if we lived lives based on quality, not on quantity?

When we live in love, life happens and the kingdom of heaven opens up before us, and it opens around us.

Don’t let your anxiety about your life tomorrow define your life today.

Let your expectation for all that life has to offer you today carry you into tomorrow.

Be filled with expectation with lamps that shine with the wonderful light that is each of you. Keep singing with our brother, Larry, “We expect you, O We expect you...”

As you wait in that expectation – an expectation worthy of the kingdom – relinquish your anxiety and ask yourself with all due excitement: “Where will God show up today? How will I welcome Jesus today?”

Keep those lamps lit and keep **food on the table** – be prepared to welcome the Jesus who arrives as your neighbor, and perhaps you will find that you've had your greatest treasure all along.

May it continue to be so.