

Fear Not Little Flock

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning.

My name, as has already been mentioned, is Luke Lillivigen. I got to talk to Jim Franks this morning, and he asked me, you know, he said, you've been here before, and I said, yes, I have. The last time that I was here in this room, I was being examined for ordination in this presbytery. And I'm glad that I'm feeling much less anxiety today than I was back then. But certainly our prayers are with Andy and his recovery, with Matthew Capone and his much-deserved time off. And I am very thankful to all of you for the opportunity to come and to worship the Lord together with you.

We're going to look at a passage today in the Gospel according to Luke. We're going to read together. It won't be in your worship guides. So if you have a Bible, you can open that up, or I've been told it will be up on the screen possibly.

[1 : 05] So we're going to look in Luke chapter 12, beginning in the 22nd verse. And Jesus said to his disciples, And yet God feeds them.

And yet I tell you, even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these.

But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith?

Do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. 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. 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.

[2 : 42] Provide yourselves with money bags 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 your heart will be also. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, Lord God, we do thank you for the gift of your word, the assurances of your love, and the opportunity that we have to come and to hear them together, to be reminded by the power of your Spirit that we indeed are dependent upon you.

And so, Lord, I pray that today, through all of this, that we would be conformed more and more to the image of your Son. Amen. It's in his name that we pray. Amen.

So what is it that makes you anxious? Now, in my everyday life, I'm a hospice chaplain. I work in Pueblo, driving all around the city to people's homes, all over the place, to visit with people who have been diagnosed and given less than six months to live.

And so, when I go to meet with them, oftentimes, it's just me and the patient, just the two of us. And so, I get to ask them really personal questions, like, what makes you anxious?

[4 : 01] What keeps you up at night? Now, in a place like this, I would love to walk out with a microphone and ask you, one by one, what is it that makes you anxious?

But my wife warns me that this might make you more anxious. So I'm not going to do it. But instead, I want to recognize that many of us feel anxious.

Jesus uses three words pretty interchangeably here. He talks about anxiety, fear, worry. All of these are things that we are familiar with at some point in our lives.

And if you're sitting there thinking to yourself, I'm not anxious, well, good. That's awesome. I'm so glad for you. Two things I want to check in with you, though, before you check out of this sermon. The first one is, why aren't you anxious? If you sit here and you think, I'm not anxious. I live in a wonderful house in a safe neighborhood. I've got a great job, well-behaved children.

[5 : 04] Everything's wonderful in my life. Then Jesus has very serious warnings for you. Because the phrase, do not be anxious, is one of those nice platitudes that we can throw out there, that we

can embroider on a throw pillow, right?

Do not be anxious. It's easy to remember. Do not be anxious. It's something you can tell your kids. Do not be anxious. It fits in a greeting card. But it comes in the context of a much larger passage where Jesus is teaching his disciples.

And it comes immediately following a verse that warns us and a parable where Jesus warns his disciples that if you are like a rich man who builds for himself storehouses full of grain, that even that will be taken away from you.

Because we have no power to provide for ourselves. So if you are sitting here this morning and saying, I'm not anxious because everything in my life is fantastic.

I have everything I need. Then listen up. And to see where it is that that should be. And if truly you sit here this morning with the true peace of Christ in your heart, also please don't check out, because the people around you, they're anxious.

[6 : 27] We live in a very, very anxious world. In fact, the psychologist Jonathan Haidt has labeled young kids today the anxious generation.

It is the thing that defines so many young people in our culture. It is something that your family members, your co-workers are struggling with.

And what could be better than hearing the good news of Jesus Christ that you can take out to them and apply into their lives? Because I promise you, if they're anxious, they are searching in vain for a relief from that anxiety.

If they're not turning to Christ, then their anxiety is going to persist. And you have the only thing that can really address their anxiety. And isn't that good news?

Isn't that worth tuning in to the words of Jesus to his disciples for? So when we look at these, Jesus starts off, and he begins right away. He says, do not be anxious.

[7 : 32] I want to put you at ease a little bit. This is not an 11th commandment. Jesus is not saying, thou shalt not be anxious. Sometimes when we worry, we can feel like we're being sinful.

We can feel like we are failing to live up to God's standard. But that's not what Jesus is saying here. He's not warning them to not be anxious.

He is encouraging them. Because he has just told them that you have no power to provide for yourself. You have no ability to protect your goods, your food on this planet.

You don't. That's a hard truth for us sometimes. To recognize that we are not in control of our lives. We desperately want to be.

But we are not in control of our lives. We are not self-sufficient. This is something that many of my patients wrestle with.

[8 : 42] If any of you have ever had to get to that point where you need to take the car keys away from your dear mother and say, no, it's not safe for you to be out there, you know how tightly we cling on to the idea of our independence.

The idea that we should be able to go where we want and do what we want whenever we want. We are independent people who don't like to be dependent upon anyone, even God.

But when Jesus tells us, fear not, little flock, he's speaking to you and to me.

We are his little flock. We are the sheep that he loves and cares for, that he feeds out of his very own hand. And he is encouraging us to not be anxious because we live in a very anxious world.

Now, what is it that makes us anxious? What is it that makes you anxious? Is it money? I got to tell you, I have my own monetary fears in this world.

[9 : 58] I was very, very blessed this Christmas break to have my daughter home from college. It's her freshman year. And we just sent her off. She's our oldest, the first one that we sent away.

And there's a lot of concern on my part when she goes. There's safety concerns. There's financial concerns. College is not cheap.

And so I wonder about things like, where's the money going to come from? How are we going to pay for these things? Is she going to take it seriously? Is she going to study hard?

Or is she going to be like me and goof off? Fail classes, lose scholarships, all of those things, right?

It's so real to me because I've done that. And at the same time that we're sending my daughter off to college, we're getting ready to welcome a new child into our home.

My wife, who's, I'm 44 years old. I'm not going to tell you how old my wife is. But we're expecting a new baby. Our youngest right now is 11. This was a bit of a shock to us.

[11 : 06] As we were financially preparing, I was going back to work full time. I was getting ready to, and we made all of our plans. They were set in place. But God had different plans for us.

And I'll admit that that brought me anxiety to say, how are we going to do this again? I have to say, I laughed a little bit because my wife and I, we got married very young.

And I had children pretty much right away. And so I normally worship at Grace and Peace just up the road from here. And we have a lot of young children running around with parents who aren't quite as young.

And I laughed over and over again thinking, I am so thankful that I was wise and had my children young. So that as they grow older, I still have the energy to do these things.

And now, of course, God laughs back at me. And so we can be anxious about important things, right? We can be anxious about things that matter, like providing for our loved ones, raising them up in the fear and the admonition of the Lord, keeping ourselves safe.

[12 : 20] We can be concerned about the world that we live in, the society that we occupy, the government that we elect. These are all good and important things. And yet Jesus assures us not to be anxious.

Because we're in a world that's telling us all the time, over and over again, to be anxious. Because it's such an effective marketing tool. We live in a world where everyone is trying to make us afraid of something so that they can sell us the solution.

Do you not have as much money as your neighbor? Here's a get-rich-quick scheme. Are your children not as beautiful as you want them to be?

Here are some braces that you can pay for. Have you run out of ways to compete with your neighbors? How about you put them into music, like my kids are, right?

How about you are afraid of the other party and so you have to vote for us? Or you're afraid of the borders or the economy or whatever it is.

[13 : 26] I have a solution that I can sell to you. But none of those things are going to deal with the real anxiety that we feel.

Because the real anxieties that we have can only be addressed by Jesus Christ himself. And so Jesus begins with the encouragement.

Do not be anxious. And he gives us not one, but two parables back to back. You'll see in them a very nice parallel about the ravens.

We all know what ravens look like, right? Those big old black birds that you see everywhere, right? Flying in the skies, eating out in the fields. They are beautiful.

But they're not like squirrels. Squirrels, as they prepare for the winter, they will go around and they'll pick up all the nuts and they'll put them someplace, right? They'll hide them.

[14 : 29] Now, thankfully for oak trees, squirrels often forget where it is that they've hidden them, right? But the idea of the squirrel is, I'm going to get ready for winter. I'm going to be ready when there's no more abundance out there.

I'm going to have it sitting here waiting for me. And what Jesus tells us is, don't look at the squirrel. Don't consider the ant. Look at the raven. The raven who doesn't do any of those things and yet somehow manages to survive.

That raven is an example to us of how we should be. Or here in beautiful, colorful Colorado in the spring when all of those gorgeous wildflowers come out, right?

That's something that we can all look forward to, driving up the road and seeing all of those colors and how beautiful they are. And Jesus tells us that not even Solomon was dressed as beautifully as a single columbine.

And he says something really important to us. And you can tell it's important because, like I said, there's two parallel parables, right?

[15 : 45] Two parallel parables. Hard to say. And sandwiched right in the middle of those two parables is sort of the point. So Jesus says, And which of you, by being anxious, can add a single hour to his span of life?

You can't. This is something that in hospice we are very, very much aware of. That we can care for you, relieve pain, give you love, help you deal with the leftover anxieties of this life.

But we cannot extend your life. If there's a doctor who doesn't know that, then they should learn it really, really quickly. Because as wonderful a blessing as modern medicine is, it cannot extend our life one minute beyond what God has already ordained for us.

And so when we live in that reality, that might make us uncomfortable. And I think it probably should. Because as much as we plan and scheme in this world, as much as we prepare ourselves for what is to come, we don't know what's going to come.

We have no idea. This is a world where we can sort of make five, ten, twenty-year plans. But God's going to do what God's going to do.

[17:16] And that might be a terrifying thought to you, if you think of God as being distant from you. Some sort of force who's monkeying with your life, and you have no say in it.

But that's not who God is. I think sometimes we, especially as good Calvinists, can look at people who are worrying, people who are in pain, and we can say, don't worry, God's in control.

And that can come across as being truly hollow if that person doesn't know who God truly is, what his character, his nature is.

Because so many people are taught to think of God as a disapproving father. Or some sort of distant bureaucrat who makes all of the laws, and it's our job to follow them.

But that's not who God is. Because remember the raven. It's not that the raven is able to survive out there without storing up food.

[18:24] It's that God provides for the raven. God clothes the flowers. They are beautiful because he loves them.

How much more does God love you than he loves a bird or a flower? The same God who sent his son to die for you is providing for you.

He is the one who is caring for you. He is the one who is in control of all of those things that you can't control. And that, brothers and sisters, that is good news.

And so when we look at it, we see that Jesus tells us that do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried.

Because think about it. How sad would it be even if you could provide everything that you need to eat and to drink? If you could do those things, but nothing more.

[19:35] Imagine if that was it. You just had just enough. But God looks at us and he tells us through his son. He says, but God tells us that the same things that the nations are seeking after, he knows that we need them.

We do need food. In this life, we need food. God designed us that way. In this life, we need clothing. So God gave us clothing. In this life, we need security.

We need hope. We need opportunity. There are things that we need that God knows that we need. And he doesn't forget that.

Remember, this is the God who, if you come to him and you ask for a serpent, if you ask him for something bad, he's gonna give you bread. He's gonna give you something good, something that you actually need.

This is the God that we worship. He knows much better than we do what it is that we need. So God says, don't go seeking after those things that you think you need.

[20:53] Instead, seek his kingdom. Seek his kingdom. Now, what does that look like? What does it mean to seek God's kingdom?

It's that I'm, I'm a PCA pastor. I've read a lot of books. I've studied a lot of scripture. I have been examined right here on this floor to do these things.

And I want to tell you that the answer is go home and pray. Learn some theology that's seeking God's kingdom. I want to end the sermon right here.

Go home. Farewell. Do not be anxious, but instead seek God's kingdom. But it's not immediately obvious, then, what should come next? What do we do with that?

How should we apply this in our lives? So Jesus tells us. He looks at us and he says, fear not, little flock. Fear not, little flock, for it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

[22:04] There are a lot of people in this world who are building up barns. There are a lot of people in this world who are seeking after power and authority in order to protect themselves.

There are a lot of people who are building their homes into fortresses to protect their loved ones. A lot of people who are building a lot of things. But it's not God's kingdom that they're building.

Because we don't build God's kingdom. God's kingdom is the one that he gives to us. And not grudgingly either. I think sometimes when we look at the scriptures we can think of God of the Old Testament being the stingy God.

The God who's always looking at us and waiting for us to mess up. But the God that Jesus shows us is a God who loves us and who provides for us.

And that if we remember the story of God's people throughout history we'll see that too. If we remember that once we were slaves in Egypt we were slaves in a land of sin and death but God by his mighty right hand brought us out.

[23 : 23] He rescued us delivered us from slavery in Egypt and we went out into the desert. And immediately the first thing we did was to sing praises to God.

The second thing we did was to complain. God's people come out and they sing led by Moses and then Miriam and then they say hey Moses we're in a desert and there's no water.

And then they look at Moses and they say hey Moses we're in a desert and there's no food. What are we gonna do? And so God gave them water. God gave them food.

He could have sustained them without food and water. But that's not how he chose to do it. He chose to do it by giving them food and water. And when he gave them that food that manna they were sent out every day to collect.

And every single morning they went out and they picked up the manna and those who gathered a little bit they were satisfied. They had everything that they needed. And those who gathered much they had none left over.

[24 : 38] There was nothing more that God was gonna do with that. You couldn't keep the manna from one day till the next because it was filled it rotted and filled with worms overnight.

God was telling them no, no, no. Each and every day you will depend on me. And then on the seventh day he told them sixth day go out and collect twice as much.

And don't collect on the seventh day. So some of them go out on the sixth day and they collect all of that they collect twice as much and then it's left over on the seventh day it's still there for them. God is miraculously providing for his people.

And some people thought this is great God who's providing for me I'm gonna go out and get even more. I'll go out on the seventh day. And there was none. God because that's not how God works. It's hard. We want to plan. We want to control. We want to save up for the future. But God doesn't love us in that way.

[25 : 46] He loves us in the way that he knows is best for us. He loves us by each and every day praying for our daily bread so that we are dependent upon him.

Because as much as we want to be independent that is rebellion against his goodness. As much as we want to provide for ourselves we can't.

We can't add a single day to our lives. But he has the power to give us bread every day. He has the power to give us eternal life.

And so he calls upon us and he says fear not little flock for it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Because that's what he loves to do. He feeds us because we need it and because he loves to feed us.

And again I'd love to just stop right there because I'm a good Presbyterian and I like to focus on God's sovereignty and God's goodness and God's character and maybe not so much on my response.

[26 : 56] But Jesus doesn't stop there so I'm not going to. He says sell your possessions and give to the needy. It's right there in black and white.

Sell your possessions and give to the needy. The God who loves us the God who provides for us he's the one telling us to sell our possessions and give to the needy.

Now does that mean you need to go home today and sell your house and live on the streets? No. I don't think that that's actually what it's saying. But take a moment to be confronted by scripture.

And say that the way that we are supposed to live in this kingdom that God gives us is with radical generosity. The kind of generosity that surprises other people.

The kind of generosity that when you go to work your co-workers will notice and they will ask you how can you be so generous? Aren't you afraid there won't be enough? And you can turn them and say I worship a God who will never let me go without.

[28 : 01] I worship a God not who has commanded me to sell my possessions or to tithe or whatever but who has freed me from worry.

My anxieties are not like your anxieties because I worship a good God who loves me cares for me and provides for me. Isn't that good news that you can take out into the workplace this week?

He says provide yourselves. I think what he's saying here is by doing so by giving to the needy you are providing yourselves with money bags that do not grow old with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail.

And Jesus is intentionally juxtaposing his promises of verse 33 with his warnings about those who lay up for themselves treasures on earth and are not rich towards God in verse 21.

He is telling us that instead of being like everyone else who's selling us anxiety and its solution that we should be people of radical generosity and that by doing so we are storing up for ourselves treasures in heaven.

[29 : 26] And at Grace and Peace each and every week when we collect the tithes and offerings we use it's actually the text out of Matthew but we use this as a text as a liturgy to remind ourselves why it is that we give.

To lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven for there your heart will be also. And I've always read this backwards. One of the most wonderful things about preaching is the opportunity to really meditate upon a passage.

Maybe a passage that you know really well and to turn it inside out and say is it true the things I've always believed? And I have to say that coming to this passage for the first time I truly believed that if you lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven that that's your response to where your heart is. if your heart is truly transformed by the gospel then you will want to lay up for yourself treasures in heaven and not treasures on earth. But actually Jesus is saying it the other way around.

And what he's saying is if you do this if you practice generosity if you practice Sabbath rest if you practice trust in God then your heart will move from this world to his world.

[30 : 55] From this kingdom of anxiety to his kingdom of provision. Because the things that we do with our bodies are important. It's not just in our mind hey I'm going to go home and trust in you.

No, no, no. I'm going to actually do something. I'm going to take money out of my account. I'm going to put it in my hand and I'm going to give it to someone else. It changes us.

It transforms us by doing that simple action. And so I encourage you this is the other opportunity I get when I get to go and preach in a congregation that's not my own. I get to encourage you in a couple of ways.

Give to your church. But also importantly I haven't asked but I'm sure it is true and Jen will tell me if it's not.

Your church has a benevolence fund. A fund that is not touched by your elders by the way. It is controlled by your deacons. Your deacons who have called to serve the needy among you to be friends to the friendless.

[32 : 05] Those deacons have a fund called the benevolence fund that you can give money to and they will distribute it on your behalf to the people who need it the most.

These are men that you trust that you know that you will look in the eye next week after you've given that money and you will hear them occasionally come up and tell you the good things that the benevolence fund has done on your behalf.

This is a radical generosity and it's incredibly ordinary. But this is the way of God, isn't it? That we don't need manna coming down from heaven each and every day.

We know that the money in our bank accounts comes from God. We know that it's not because we are so smart that we have that fantastic job or because we're so hard working that we're going to be able to keep it.

We know that's from God. And so because we know that we are free from anxiety. To know that if we ever lose those things it's not because God failed us.

[33 : 20] It's not because he turned his back on us. It's because it wasn't what was best for us. Because our loving Father is giving us his kingdom.

And so in a few moments we're going to come together together and we're going to share the Lord's Supper. And this right here is the very best example of what it means to be his little flock.

It's a very tangible physical way that we come together and are fed by God. we're going to we're going to prepare ourselves to feed upon Christ himself who gave himself for us.

Because sometimes when we think about the powerful God who can give us a whole kingdom we can also forget the price that was paid for that kingdom.

It didn't come cheaply. because our rebellion against him wasn't small. When we stood in that garden and we said the food that you've given us is not good enough food what we want is this food

over here.

[34 : 38] But all of that has been reversed. All of that has been transformed so that you and I can come together at this table and we can be fed by heavenly food and we can reside together if just for a brief time before leaving here in his kingdom that he loves to give to us.

So let us pray. Heavenly Father Lord God we thank you for the gift of your son for his work upon the cross and for his warnings but especially Lord God we thank you for the encouragement that you've given us this morning through the gospel according to Luke.

This encouragement to not be anxious to not worry as the world worries but to live as your people as his little flock.

Lord I pray that you would prepare our hearts to come into his presence and to feast upon his body. Amen.