

Do not be afraid, little flock Sunday 10th August Hamstreet

Luke 12:32-40

Isaiah 1:1, 10-20

May the words

What has blessed you this week? I have been blessed by the time I have spent with God, with my grandchildren, and cleaning the house. I love cleaning, and it gives me joy to have my house clean and tidy. It also gives me joy to give away the things that I don't need, to recycle things that can be recycled. I like to do what I can to protect God's world and be responsible in my use of it.

At St. Martin's we support a refugee who has long had British citizenship, but who fled real atrocities in his own country, including watching his whole family being massacred, and had a long and difficult journey to England to claim asylum. He is still suffering from the experiences that he has been through. He now needs an operation, but the hospital is not local, and he asked for support with the fares that he will need to pay to go to the hospital for the checks, operation, and after care. We are only a small church, but we gave one week's collection towards supporting him. We collected over £200 for his expenses, and to say that he was grateful would be an understatement. We are called to be generous.

We are looking this morning at one of several stories told by Jesus in answer to a question from a man in the crowd. The man said to Jesus, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." Inheritance disputes were common at the time of Jesus, although more so amongst the Gentiles. In Jewish teaching, according to Deuteronomy, the eldest son received a double portion, but disputes still arose. Rabbis were considered to be experts in the law and were sometimes called upon to help resolve these disputes. Once we understand the culture of the day, we can see that this question did not just come out of nowhere but was an appeal to Jesus, who was clearly seen as a rabbi, to help with the situation.

However, the man did not get quite the response that I suspect he was hoping for, as Jesus warns against greed. Jesus then goes on to ask his disciples what they treasure in life, and our account this morning forms part of that response.

What do we treasure in life? If Jesus was here this morning and asked us that question, how would we respond? Take a moment to dig down in your hearts and consider what you treasure most in your life.

I suspect that what we treasure in life is different at different times in our lives. Sometimes this is to do with age, what we treasure in our teenage years might look different to what we treasure in our twenties, forties, sixties, or in our eighties. I also wonder if what we treasure can change according to life circumstances. My mother

died of cancer when she was 36, and through a set of what I am sure were God planned situations I became a Christian. However, as I came towards the same age of 36, I became very aware that I was anxious. We are all human, as a parent of five children I had no road map for how to be a parent going forwards. Once I passed that age, I really valued every day as a gift from God which was not to be wasted, life itself was my treasure, and it was not to be frittered away on things that were not important.

Things can happen in a moment which can change peoples lives forever. What they treasure about life changes, and their future changes because of it. We have recently had the anniversary of the murder of the three girls in Southport. For their families, their school friends, and the local community life will never be the same again. Each of the girl's families have set up charities which will benefit other children and families; not only was it a way to help navigate their grief but also to make the tragic deaths of the girls count. I suspect that what they treasured most in life changed in response to the deaths of their children.

What do we treasure most in our lives?

What do we pray about in our personal times of prayer? Do the prayers that we pray and what we pray for represent the things that are important to us?

Jesus tells the disciples not to worry about what they will eat and drink, or about what they will wear because their heavenly Father knows that they need these things. If they focus on God's kingdom then God will provide these things for them.

Our reading this morning follows on from this as Jesus says, "Do not be afraid, little flock".

What do we fear?

Most of us are blessed in that we do not need to worry about what we are going to eat, drink and wear, but what do we fear?

Only last week the world recorded the one of the largest megathrust earthquakes ever recorded, with warnings going out for hundreds of miles around the area of possible tsunamis as a result of the movement of the Pacific tectonic plate and the Okhotsk tectonic plate in the Pacific Ocean. Thankfully the early warning systems that are now in place and the lower than anticipated impact meant that far less damage was done than might have been expected.

There is a lot to fear in the world around us, wars, terrorism, the economy, global warming, poverty, homelessness, and disease to mention but a few. The news and media outlets are full of bad news and are rarely focussed on the good news stories that we know are also happening.

What do we fear?

Is what we fear linked to what we treasure? Do we fear that our treasure will be taken away?

Do not be afraid little flock.

Little flock. We and many other churches that meet faithfully together see ourselves as little flocks. In the benefice we have been meeting together to get a common understanding of mission, and what that looks like in our parishes, and each parish is working on a mission plan. One aim of mission is to build our flocks, although mission is about so much more. Mission is not just about increasing the numbers that worship in our church; it is about maximising the impact that the church has in the local community, and it is also about growing the depth of commitment and faithfulness of those who worship in the little flocks.

We can easily be disheartened as we see large numbers of Christians gathered for Songs of Praise, for Christian festivals, and think that we are, by comparison, an insignificant little flock. That is not the case, and many of those who gather come from little flocks exactly like ours. Together we are God's army, God's presence, and God's servants in this community.

In many ways the faithful across the world are few in number, and we could see ourselves as a flock of defenceless sheep, but the rest of the sentence in our reading is so important as Jesus goes on to say, "for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

We may be a little flock, but if we have our priorities right, if we have our hearts in the right place, if we treasure the things that are important to God, God is pleased to give us the kingdom.

There is the reassurance in our reading this morning that what we see on earth is not all that there is to life. In our material world it can be easy to forget that there is far more to life than what we can see, touch and feel in the physical world. We have God as our Father, words which open a prayer which we pray every week, if not more often. It is God's good pleasure to give us the kingdom, a treasure in heaven which is imperishable and which no one can take away from us. We have a route map for life in the Bible, which so clearly teaches that there is far more to our world than what we see. We have God's protection, with the promise of the return of Jesus, which can reassure us when we find that life comes with its own challenges and we can fear what our future on earth will bring.

Does fear of our future here on earth cause us to behave in ways that are not honouring to God? Are we affected by what the world considers to be a successful people, and do we forget that we are in the world but not of the world? As Christians, are we able to put these things aside so that we can focus on bringing in God's reign here on earth?

God is **pleased** to give us the kingdom. Pleased. Pleased to give. We don't have to earn our way into God's Kingdom; God is pleased to give us His kingdom. Are we pleased to share God's blessings with others? What is clear from our reading today is that money and earthly possessions are not to be the things that we treasure.

"Do not be afraid little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom". This is the God who created the universe, who delights to be part of His creation, who cares for his creation, who allows the lilies to grow and be glorious, who tends to the birds of the air, who knows the number of hairs on our head.

As we prepare to bring God's kingdom into our own community, we are challenged to consider what we treasure in life, and whether we are using our lives and our possessions in the right way. Is loving God the most important thing in our lives?

We are called to be prepared and watchful so that we can receive the blessings that our heavenly father has in store for us in His kingdom. We need to be ready to welcome God when he steps into our lives and praise Him for His blessings, we need to be ready to welcome God when He returns so that we can be part of the heavenly feast to which we are all invited.

Knowing God should give us confidence in the future and protect us from the fears of this world. None of us knows what is round the corner, but we do know that God is always on our side and can use this little flock to bless others. We sang shine Jesus shine, which reminds us that as we gaze on God's kingly brightness, so our faces start to display God's likeness, and God changes our lives. As we live in this community our lives should mirror God's glory. Do we spend time each day gazing on God's kingly brightness?

We often reflect on how counter cultural Jesus was, but we should be counter cultural too. As those around us worry about what the future will bring, we should be confident that God has it covered. Are we living lives of blessing, or do we fear the future?

As we read words that were written many centuries ago, the truth of them remains as relevant today as it has always been. We do not need to worry about worldly things, and we do not need to store up treasures on earth. God our heavenly father loves us, and our faith grows as we learn to trust in Him completely.

As we seek to put God first, all the blessings of God's kingdom are available to us. All I once held dear, built my life upon, all this world reveres, and wars to own, all I once thought gain I counted loss, spent and worthless now, compared to this. Knowing you Jesus, there is no greater thing, and I love you Lord. **Amen.**