

Sermon: **Fear Not**  
Text: Luke 12:32-34

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*“Be afraid. Be very afraid.”* The phrase comes from a 1980s science-gone-mad movie entitled “The Fly”. It has since become a quotable quote. Be afraid. Be very afraid. I wonder how much of our lives are rooted in anxiety and fear.

We do have many reasons to fear, don’t we? Threats of terror, potential pandemics, environmental devastation, economic uncertainties, nuclear annihilation. These all represent scary potentials.

Beside these there are a host of personal concerns and circumstances that cause us to fear. I might list a long litany of things, but what are you afraid of? What causes you to fear?

We are all well acquainted with fear. It’s a natural reflex.

Fear can be a terribly crippling emotion. It can cause us to run away in retreat; to pull into ourselves for security. It can cause us to react in an outburst of anger, hate and fighting.

Then there are all sorts of neurotic phobias that can control us. They are unreasonable fears, none-the-less real. Like my fear of heights. Tell me a million times that there is no reason for me to be afraid, but you won’t get me on a Ferris wheel or a rollercoaster.

But fear, of the right kind and in the right doses, can actually be a good motivator, pushing us in a good direction. Robert Wuthnow, head of the Sociology Department at Princeton University, has just written a book that suggests the positive influence of fear. He tells how fear can prompt us to roll up our sleeves and get busy solving the problem before us. Rather than cowering and curling up in a fetal position, fear can push us to take action and do something about the cause of our fear. The title of his book is “Be Very Afraid.” It might lead to some positive corrective action.

The Bible uses several words to describe several kinds of fear. One is holy fear, often called reverential fear. It is our positive response to our understanding of God. In this sense, God-fearers do not cower before God, but reflect a sense of awe and reverence before God’s majesty and authority and sovereignty. It’s the fear that is called “the beginning of wisdom”.

But the Bible also speaks of a slavish kind of fear. We are all familiar with the Greek word *phobos*, from which is derived our English word *phobia*. This is the fear Jesus speaks of in our lesson when he says *phobou un, Fear not*. He is saying “You need no longer be controlled by negative slavish fear. You must no longer be afraid. Fear not”.

These words, “fear not”, are familiar words expressed by God and God’s messengers throughout the Bible, and are a pattern in Luke’s Gospel. They are words spoken again and again to those who might otherwise have good reason to fear, but are being reminded that in the covenantal love of God they are not left to their own human devises and confusion, and that God’s divine rule and reign is real. They need not live in fear.

If we *are* left to our own devises and dependent upon our own capacities then we *do* have much to fear. If our lives are lived by chance and are driven by human aggression, then Jesus’ admonition not to fear sounds like a weak “buck up, buddy” sort of sentiment.

But hear the words of Jesus this morning.

*Do not be afraid, little flock,  
for it is your Father’s good pleasure  
to give you the kingdom.*

This is the word of the Good Shepherd to his flock of lambs. *Fear not. I will lead you to green pastures and quiet waters. I will restore your life and vitality and lead you in right paths. Even in the darkest valleys you need not fear evil, because I am right there with you, and will be all the days of your life. Fear not.*

This is the word of the Creator and Father God; the one who created and formed you. *Fear not. I have redeemed you. I have called you by name and you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. When you pass through the rivers, they will not overwhelm you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned or consumed. For I am the Lord your God. Fear not.*

It was the word of the angel of the Lord to the priest Zechariah whose wife was barren. *Fear not, Zechariah, your prayer has been heard. Your wife will have a son and you will call his name John. Fear not.*

It was the word of the angel Gabriel to a virgin names Mary. *Fear not, Mary. You have found favor with God, and now you will conceive in your womb and bear a son and you will name him Jesus. Fear not.*

It was the word of the angel of the Lord to the shepherds in the fields. *Fear not, for I am bringing you good news of great joy for all people. To you is born a Savior who is Christ, the Lord. Fear not.*

It was the word of Jesus to a teacher of the Synagogue names Jairus, who had been begging Jesus to heal is 12 year old daughter, but who had just received the news that it was now too late for his daughter had died. *Fear not. Only believe and your daughter will live.*

It was the word of Jesus to his disciples who were beginning to realize the true cost of discipleship. *Fear not, friends. Do not fear those who can kill the body but can do no more. Do not be afraid. My eye is on the sparrows. They are not forgotten. You are of more value than they. I'll not forget you. The very hairs on your heads are known to me. Fear not.*

In the context of our lesson it is once again the words of Jesus to his disciples. *Don't worry about what you will eat or wear. Your life is more than food. Your body is more than clothing. Don't keep striving for all these things. Your Father knows you need them. Instead, strive for the kingdom of God; the will and rule and reign of God; and these things will be given you as well. Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*

*So don't live your life buying and holding. Live your life selling and giving. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

Finally, it is the word of the Good Shepherd, the Father God, and the Savior Jesus, to you; to someone or ones here this morning that really need to hear it. *Fear not. Don't let fear be the last word. Don't let anxiety rule your life. Put your confidence in the important and imperishable things of God's kingdom. Let loose or your hold on your life and sell out to God. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

Amen.