

Pentecost 12 FLC

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Let us pray: *God of love, give us your Spirit and enable us to trust your wondrous promise that you delight in giving us all good things. Dispel our fears that we may rejoice in your wondrous creation; your presence with us in word, prayer bread and wine; in the gift of one another; and in your kingdom come in Jesus. Amen.*

I was emotionally moved by a piece of art I recently viewed on my sister-in-law's bedroom wall – something she had picked up in a Thrift Store. I had not seen it before and have no idea who the artist is. It was a simple line drawing of a surly, rough-hewn, bearded, not so good looking man. His face and eyes eluded absolute pleasure, delight, joy! In his arms he was holding a lamb -- cuddled into his chest, sound asleep, at complete peace. I noticed his burly, hairy arm that grasped the lamb and ever so subtle -- a wound, I think a spike-hole, just above his wrist. We Christians know what is being portrayed.

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Did we catch that? It changes everything! God doesn't just want to give us some good stuff. God doesn't just hope we do OK. God is just sitting around waiting for us to earn God's favor or watching to make sure we

toe the line. God wants to give us the kingdom and all good things. Jesus says it's your Father's "good pleasure" -- that is, God delights in giving, God really, really wants to give us the kingdom and all good things.

Trusting that promise – we hear everything that follows in our gospel reading differently. His promise is that we will receive good things in living simply, in generosity instead of accumulation, in community rather than only looking out for number one, in vulnerability and relationship, in weakness rather than strength, in the absolute fullness of the NOW! It's easy to miss the God of radical grace and love if all we see in this text is Jesus shaking his finger in our face, accusing and commanding. If promise – then there is invitation and freedom for us! Then and only then can love flourish.

I think you know that the most common line in the whole of the Scripture is "Be not afraid" -- "Have no fear". Someone told me once if I remember correctly over 150 times in the Bible. With all his brilliance, Albert Einstein, at the end of his life said, "Now I see that the only question is, 'Is the universe friendly?' . . . I have begun to discover its physical meaning but the question still haunts me, 'Is it friendly?' ". Is this whole thing out there on our side or not? Is the universe hostile or benevolent? It is at root OK or is it not? Christianity tells us that we live in a benevolent universe and it IS on our side! All is grace, radical grace! We do

not need to be afraid. Scarcity is not the primal experience but abundance. If we know this, trust this, we can relax and let go! *"Have no fear, little flock, it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom!"*

Mary Anne Williamson says in her book RETURN TO LOVE that the "fear worldview" and the "love worldview" do not know one another and are mutually exclusive. The "fear worldview" is what the Scripture calls "the world" or we might say "the system" or what Paul calls "the flesh".

Our culture teaches us that everything out there is hostile. We have to dominate, compare, control, insure – we have to be "in charge". And we move deeper and deeper into a world of anxiety not its opposite: faith! It worsens in this current political climate and post 9/11 mentality and in this time of terrorism. At the root of the deconstruction of our society is an utterly cynical response to reality – a universe without meaning, purpose, or direction. Faith SEES differently. "Have no fear, little flock, it is the Father's delight to give you the kingdom." Someone said to me recently that the problem is no longer to believe in God but to believe in humanity." Maybe so. We can only be fully human IN the love of God.

Is it the deep call of God for the church today to become a community where people are so rooted in the promise of God's good pleasure, reminded of their inherent identity as God's

beloved children, and affirmed in their inherent self-worth and dignity -- that we can see all humankind, even our enemies, as similarly beloved and deserving of self-worth, dignity, and God's good things?

How would we act then, if we knew that God's always got our back? How would we act then knowing that we have the freedom to fail because it ultimately doesn't matter and that God always meets us in our failure *"Have no fear, little flock, it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."*

So come to God's table this morning! Come for courage and faith and hope. Did you notice the utter reversal in the little story Jesus tells God's surprising presence where we do not expect it? As they wait expectantly for the master to return from the wedding banquet dressed for action and their lamps lit -- now imagine, this is the new groom coming home with his new bride who will be mistress of the household perhaps even for their first night together. But what happens to those slaves living expectantly and ready in the fullness of the NOW? Surprise! When the master comes through the door, he hoists up his robe and fastens his belt. The master has them sit down and he comes and serves them! *"Have no fear, little flock, it the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."*

Come! The master is girded and ready to serve you! He meets you hidden and revealed under earthly good things, bread and

wine -- for forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation – a foretaste of the feast to come! Amen