

“Investment Advice”  
Luke 12:32-40

A national magazine assigned a photographer to take pictures of a forest fire. They told him a small plane would be waiting at the airport to fly him over the fire. The photographer arrived at the airstrip just an hour before sundown. Sure enough, a small Cessna airplane stood waiting. He jumped in with his equipment and shouted, “Let’s go!” The pilot, a tense-looking man, turned the plane into the wind, and soon they were in the air, though flying erratically. “Fly over the north side of the fire,” said the photographer, “and make several low-level passes.” “Why?” asked the nervous pilot. “Because I’m going to take pictures!” yelled the photographer. “I’m a photographer and photographers take pictures.” The pilot replied, “You mean you’re not my flight instructor?”

Now what! There are times in life when things seem so scary that it is hard not to panic. What do we do when we are afraid? Sometimes we are not even aware that we are afraid, yet our actions are based on our fears. How do we deal with fear? When our security rug is pulled out from under us what do we do? What resources do we bring to those times of fear? What does the Bible and faith have to say about fear?

It is interesting to see that there is a consistent theme in the Bible about fear and it is summed up in this simple statement: “Don’t be afraid.” In today’s text from Luke 12 we hear this statement again, “Don’t be afraid,” with Jesus telling the disciples how to live, especially as it came to the way they dealt with their possessions. Last week when I talked about greed I emphasized the fact that most of greed comes out of our fear and need for security. Now basic fear that helps us run from danger is good because it is in our instinct to help us survive. However, the fear I am talking about is the kind that controls our lives and motivates us to act in destructive ways. This chapter in Luke deals heavily with the issues of this kind of fear and worry as they relate to our finances. Jesus invites the disciples to adopt a different worldview, one that is liberated from fear and from attachment to possessions and material success. The early Church had to also deal with another fear: The fear of the end of the world. The promise of the return of Christ and the establishment of the kingdom of God was seen by some of the early Christians as something that would take place in their lifetime. So, they were worried about being prepared for that day. But again the text in Luke invites the disciples and the early Christians to be vigilant about their faith but never live in fear. The invitation is to live every day faithfully working for the kingdom of God but always remembering that in God there is no fear. This invitation to live without fear is easier said than done for many of us. We hear the teachings of Jesus and the stories of God’s love for us in the midst of pain, yet our fears are not gone because they are based on the reality of our lives being vulnerable. We are vulnerable to illness, violence, natural disasters, lack of resources, broken relationships and many other things in life. And just telling ourselves to not be afraid does not seem to do the trick.

I think part of the problem lies in our need for protection which we associate with God. And often times when God does not seem to satisfy that need, we resort back to our own resources of fear and control. We arm pilots in order to make flying safer. We computerize voting machines in order to make voting results more accurate. We promote fear and hate of those who are different from us. But in the end, we are always left with that feeling of insecurity if we only rely on any methods of protection, even our religious ones. In his book, *A Cup of Coffee at the Soul*

*Café*, Leonard Sweet says, “There is a popular religious mentality abominating the air today. It says that to find favor with God is to find the perfect boss, the perfect spouse, the perfect child, the perfect colleague, the perfect bishop or pastor. . . . In sum, to find favor is to be blessed by health, wealth, and happiness. This is all that many Americans want in religion. They want a ‘Jacuzzi Jesus’ – an experience that will leave them relaxed, warm, and bubbly and yet, at the same time, feeling fit and trim when they get out—like they’ve just visited the gym. But the favor of a ‘Jacuzzi Jesus,’ the favor of Christian hedonism, is the death of the soul.” When Jesus told the disciples “Do not be afraid,” he was not promising them a life without difficulties or challenges. In fact, by following him, the disciples’ lives became more difficult and challenging. The lack of fear to which Jesus invites us is about a deeper kind of faith that is not dependent on the circumstances of life being good or bad. The trick is not about hiding from life and being preserved in some ivory tower of faith. It is about learning to accept and even embrace all of life without fear and resistance. This is like the teaching of how to deal with rip tide. If you are caught in one of those currents, the real trick is not to panic but to go with it. Swimmers need to swim with the current instead of against it. The same is true when we are skidding on ice or snow while driving. The main thing to remember is not to steer against but with where your car is skidding and gently correcting. This is one of the hardest lessons in faith: Learning to trust and to embrace whatever we are undergoing without panic and fear in order to find our way. But how do we cultivate such a way of life that is based on trust and letting go?

The key to this kind of fearless way of life is learning to invest wisely. I am not referring to our finances only. I am thinking of our investments in terms of time and energy. This is what Jesus was saying to his disciples when he said, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” What consumes your energy every day? What do you spend your time on? These are the investments we make every day of our lives. These are the things that prepare us for a fearless life. The key to a life that is deeply rooted in God’s love is our practices of faith that help us to access our inner resources. It is not enough to just mentally learn that ultimately we have nothing to fear in life. No matter how many times we read or speak these words, they don’t come alive to us until we have experienced the deep peace that comes from our communion with God. This is not an escape from the world and its troubles. It is about learning to live in the world with the knowledge that God is with us and therefore we have nothing to fear because of that love and companionship. In their book, *Reconciling All Things: A Christian View of Justice, Peace, and Healing*, Immanuel Kantongole and Chris Rice of Duke University’s Center for Reconciliation, tell the following story: They were in a conversation with a colleague of theirs about the need to step back from the fires of conflict raging in the world today, and as Christians seek to see where God is at work in the ministry of peace and reconciliation. Their colleague impatiently replied: “The fire out there is raging. What we need is water to put it out, not empty and distracting theological discussions.” But the authors go on to say – “Simply put, Christians contend there is a world beyond the fires...If Christians are to reconnect the world of fires and firefighting to the story of God, stepping back is crucial.”

We need the time to pray, to learn to be still in the presence of God, to allow God to shape us every day. This is what allows us to be whole and to act in life not out of our fears but out of our being grounded in God’s love. Our ability to commune with God is what brings true transformation to our lives from fear to faith, from hate to love.

In his book, *Hidden Wholeness*, Parker Palmer tells the story about a time of transformation for him. He says, “At Pendle Hill, the Quaker community where I lived and worked for eleven years, our lives were so intertwined that people could quickly become attached to each other and just as quickly alienated. But *alienated* is a mild word to describe my relation to one woman who

lived there. She was, in my mind, the devil's spawn, sent here directly from the pits of hell to destroy all that is green and good about life on earth. The people at Pendle Hill gather every morning in a 'meeting for worship,' forty-five minutes of communal silence, occasionally broken by words spoken spontaneously from the heart. One meeting, I arrived late for worship, and the only seat available was next to *her*. Agitated, I came close to turning around and walking out. But I managed somehow to sit down, close my eyes, and start to meditate, slowly forgetting that I was sitting next to a creature from the dark side. About half an hour later, head still bowed, I opened my eyes and found myself staring at the upturned hand this woman had rested on her knee. There, spotlighted by a shaft of sunlight, I saw the faint but steady throb of an artery in her wrist, the elemental beat of her very human heart. In that moment, I knew beyond words that here was a person just like me, with strengths and weaknesses, hopes and disappointments, joys and despairs. In that moment, my sense of who she was, and of who I was to her, underwent some sort of transformation. I never became close to this woman. In truth, I never stopped feeling wary of her. But I could no longer demonize her as I had until that silent, sunlit moment. This revelation of her humanity, and this reframing of our relationship, could not have happened, I believe, had I tried to 'talk thing out' with her. There is a depth of communion in silence that sometimes trumps what we can achieve with words."

Do you invest enough time each week, each day in communion with God? Enough time to allow the Spirit of God to teach you the ways of love and faith? This is not a guilt trip for you to find time for one more thing to do. This is an invitation to pay attention to have your treasure where you want your heart to be. Amen.