

August 8, 2010
Luke 12:32-40

In Another Land

About 10 years ago now, I received a check for \$5,000 in the mail. The letter that accompanied the check read that my grandfather's brother had passed away and that he named me and my brother in his will. I was saddened to hear of the loss of my uncle Hilbert, and I felt deeply moved that he had remembered me. In a small way, I lived the dream of found money that's become cliché: A rich bachelor uncle dies and leaves you his fortune. A surprise, a shock and, depending on the amount you inherit, an event that could change your life in a radical way.

That's how God's call to new life, life in God's kingdom, comes to us. That's how God's call came to Abraham. Abraham is living a happy prosperous life in the familiar land of family and friends when God calls Abraham, telling him the God has an inheritance prepared for Abraham – it includes land, children and blessing for the whole world that will come through him. God promises ... later on God will make the promise a binding contract, a covenant ... and Abraham believes. So Abraham leaves the old land behind and follows God's lead to another land, the land of God's promise, the land of his inheritance.

Our Lord Jesus came among God's people proclaiming the good news of the coming of God's kingdom. Good news that reads like a surprising news that you have inherited a fortune. God has chosen you to be a citizen of God's kingdom, a member of his household, a child, an heir.

"Don't worry about your life," Jesus says. "Your heavenly Father knows who you are and what you're up against." He even knows the intricate, life and death details of the lives of birds.

"Don't worry about what you're going to wear or eat or where you're going to live," Jesus says. "Your heavenly Father loves you, and he has promised to give you what you need when you need it."

"Don't worry," Jesus says. "Don't worry. Don't be afraid." Don't fear the things we fear the most. Don't worry about what we worry the most about. Don't worry. After all, you are an heir, and your Father is happy to give you the kingdom. And that's good news. Jesus preaches good news of God's kingdom. Jesus calls us to a new life, a new way of living, a new way of seeing the world.

Jesus tells us that we have a family inheritance – God's kingdom. That's good news. Taken seriously, however, this news changes how we regard and value our money and our possessions. It changes our vision and expectation for our future and the future of the world.

With a fortune invested in God's kingdom, guaranteed ours by God's own promise through the Lord Jesus, what do we do with this stuff? It's really one of the very first questions of the Christian life, the crisis of God's call, God's adoption, our baptism. In Jesus, we die to this world and its stuff, and we turn to God, trust him, believe the promise, the good news. The question remains, then, what do we do with stuff – with the

wealth, the inheritance, the investments, the property, the riches ... and even with the junk ... we've piled up, worried about and have been afraid of losing? Jesus' answer is simple: "Sell it. Use it. Give it away. Put it to work for God's kingdom by giving it to someone in need, by answering someone's prayers."

There was this congregation a few years that had a million dollar endowment. Plenty saved up for years to come. What the people of this congregation feared, though, was that it may someday have to touch the principal, instead of using just the earnings. Then in just a few months the thing they feared happened, the value of that principal investment dropped by 30 percent. It was like someone had broken into their house and robbed them. \$300,000 just disappeared. If they had known. If they had only known. Now, what could have been done for the sake of the world and its people in need? What could have been done to proclaim the coming of God's kingdom, with that kind of money?

The members and even their pastor wrung their hands, worried, fretted and feared. Instead of comforting themselves with the good news of Jesus – "Don't be afraid, little flock, the Father has chosen to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give them away to someone in need" – they told each other: "It's only a loss on paper. The market will come back." Now what kind of promise is that? In whom and in what God are we putting our trust?

That's the point Jesus makes as he lovingly invites his disciples into a different kind of life: The true principal, our real treasure is ours in our loving, faithful and trustworthy God, not in our investments here. We can give without fear. Use it all. Give it all. God's kingdom is coming, it's breaking in. It's time to get dressed in our baptismal robes, time to be ready for action.

You see, when God calls us into a new relationship with him through baptism, he promises us an inheritance in his kingdom, in his realm. It's kind of like find out that you are really royalty in another land. Your wealth and possessions and the things we count on for stability and security in this land have no value in that other land. Or it's like if we moved to another country. We'd have to exchange our dollars for the currency of that realm. We'd have to convert our dollars into something else, say like faith, hope, love leveraged by mercy, humility, righteous justice, forgiveness, generosity, faithfulness, perseverance, patience and ... what else does God value? We need not look any further than Jesus himself, who loved us unconditionally, who suffered and died for us and who now lives for us, risen from the dead as the one in whom we enjoy the promise of a great inheritance. That kind of treasure never loses value, never vanishes or leaves us desolate. God's love endures.

It's not easy, though, letting go of this stuff. Selling it. Giving it away. Especially, when the only guarantee comes from a God who calls us to leave it all behind, move to another land and then says, trust me. I love you. It's not easy.

That's why we're in this together. That's why we don't have to go it alone. To hear God's call, to believe God's promise, to go where God is leading isn't done alone. Abraham and Sarah go together. Jesus calls a group of disciples. We are baptized into a community of disciples – this Family of Faith. A church is people, God's people

worshipping and serving together. Together we can do what we cannot do alone – let go of our possessions, give to people in need, proclaim the good news of God’s kingdom, bless the whole world in Jesus’ name, invite others into the inheritance we share with Christ in his suffering, death and resurrection for us and for the sake of the world.

I believe that’s at the heart of our vision and mission statement – to be a worshipping and serving community of Jesus’ Christ. I’m new, but I think that is the purpose of this Ministry Center. That is be a base from which we may go out to give and serve and share the good news that this world with its poverty, greed and injustice is passing away and a new world is coming. So, have no fear little flock ... it makes our Father happy to give you the kingdom. Go, sell your possessions and give it to the needy. It’s time to get dressed in God’s righteous justice, time to be ready for action.