

**Luke 12:32-34**

A police officer is shot and killed in St. Louis. Five people in our area are dead from the excessive heat. Six miners are still trapped underground in Utah, probably dead, and three of those attempting to rescue them are killed. Over five hundred are dead in Peru from an earthquake. “Do not be afraid, little flock,” says Jesus.

Our children and grandchildren are going back to school. Some of them are heading off to college. Will they be safe while traveling...safe on their busses? Will they be safe from predators; from terrorists? “Do not be afraid, little flock,” says Jesus.

The stock market rises and falls like the tide. The cost of gasoline eats away at our savings. Everything is costing more these days. Many cannot even afford to retire. “Do not be afraid, little flock,” says Jesus.

Your Lord is not telling you to ignore the troubles around you. That would be impossible. We cannot close our eyes and ears to the struggles around us and within us. Like Abram, who could not ignore the fact that he was childless even though God had promised him a son. Abram could not close his eyes to the painful reality that he had no heir, no child to hold and to love. But in the midst of his struggle God directed Abram to believe His promise by faith. Every night before he went to bed, Abram could look up at the stars in the sky and remember that even though he did not have a son yet, God’s promise was that his descendants would fill the earth as the stars filled the sky. And every day God directs you to look into His Word and to see how He was faithful to men like Abram and Abel, Enoch and Noah, Isaac and Jacob. And as He helped them through life’s struggles, so He will be with you. He will not forsake you when life is difficult. His word of promise to you is this: “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the Kingdom.”

And when you have His Kingdom you have everything, even if everything else you have is taken away. If little Johnny loses the dollar his mother and father gave to him, even though he may cry and feel like all is lost, he has really lost nothing, because his mother and father still love him; they will still provide for him; they will feed him and clothe him and give him what he needs. And so with us. No matter what we lose; no matter what sickness and death take away, God still gives you His Kingdom. He still loves you and will take care of you. “Do not be afraid.” In Christ Jesus you have everything.

And you have everything because God has chosen gladly to give it to you. It is not we who choose His Kingdom. He chooses to give His Kingdom to us. And that is a comfort, for if it was up to us we would not choose God’s Kingdom. If you’re anything like me, then you make poor choices day after day—because I know that I do. We are weak and sinful. We choose not what is godly, but what is worldly. We choose to spend our time on what pleases us, not on what pleases God. We choose selfishly. We make sinful choices. I know that I am guilty, and if you are like me, then you are too.

The comforting thing is that God’s Kingdom is yours despite the wrong choices that we make, because God in Christ, has chosen to give you His Kingdom. He chose you in Christ before this world was formed. He chose to love you and forgive you of your sins. He chose to bring you into His family; to give you a place in His Heavenly home. In Christ,

God chose to pour upon your head Baptism's rich grace. He chose to reveal Himself to you as a God of mercy and compassion. He chose to have His Son die the death you deserved. He chose Jesus to suffer hell's sorrow for you.

And God's choice for you was made with no regrets. He chose "gladly" to give you the Kingdom. It was with joy that God sent Jesus to die for you. It was with delight that God brought you into His family through Holy Baptism. And it is His pleasure to feed you day by day, year after year with His living Word and Christ's holy body and blood. And these treasures of the Kingdom are yours no matter how hot the temperature rises; no matter how high gas prices soar; no matter what sickness and death may do to you or to your loved ones. "Do not be afraid, little flock," your Savior says to you, "for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the Kingdom."

And because He gives you His Kingdom, Jesus says: "Make for yourselves purses which do not wear out." Little Johnny looks forward to Christmas time. And when it's time to hang the stockings by the fireplace, little Johnny always picks the biggest stocking he can find—one that may be twice as big as his sister's stocking; one that can hold gift, after gift, after gift, and still have room for more. Perhaps we should understand Jesus' words in this way: "Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out"...the biggest stocking you can find! Because as God gives you His Kingdom, the gifts of His grace keep coming, and coming, and coming.

If Johnny's mother and father were stingy with their love, or were unable to shower him with Christmas presents, then little Johnny would not need a big stocking at all. God is not stingy. He is able to give you exactly what He has promised. To Abram the gifts began with the birth of Isaac, and then continued with the birth of Jacob, and then Jacob's children, and their children, and the earth became full of Abram's descendants as the stars filled the night sky. And so with you. In Holy Baptism God claimed you as His child; and so through Word and Sacraments He gives you an abundance of His gifts. For the sake of Jesus Christ your Father in heaven gives you every blessing you need for this life and for the life to come.

So why do we choose the smallest stocking? Why do we act as though our God has little or nothing to give us? We're content to have just a passing acquaintance of the Bible; we hardly open His Word. We're satisfied with just a nibble, now and then, on the body and blood of our Savior. We think nothing of spending our time on activities that we enjoy rather than on opening our ears to the hearing of His Word. We act as though God has nothing of value to give us.

Jesus says that because God gives us His Kingdom, we should make purses which do not wear out. But I think that often we're embarrassed to even carry a purse. We're ashamed to admit that we're sinful beggars who desperately need God's rich gifts to us in Jesus Christ. To carry the purse Jesus speaks of is nothing more than to live by faith. But if we truly have faith, as we say we do, our purses will be open to receive from God His gifts to us in Word and Sacrament. We will not close our purse on Sunday morning. We will gladly open it here to the preaching of His Word and the eating and drinking of His flesh and blood.

Faith receives the gifts of God. And where His pure Word is preached and taught, there His gifts come to us in abundance. There is His Kingdom. And there is where our purses need to be open. Not the smallest stocking and purse with which we can just get by, but the biggest—the one little Johnny would choose, for like his mother and father, our God gives, and gives, and gives.

For 148 years in this place God has been giving His gifts to His people. You are His people today, and you are the ones that He has chosen gladly to give His Kingdom to. You and I do not deserve this. But do not be afraid. What we truly deserve, Jesus already suffered for you. All that's left for you is grace upon grace, and mercy upon mercy. God forgives you. For all the sinful choices you and I make, God forgives you. For doubting His promises, He forgives you. For closing your purse of faith to His gifts, He forgives you. I have great joy in telling you that there is not one of you that God is angry with. Jesus is the Savior of each and every one of you. And for Jesus' sake, your Father in heaven chooses gladly to give you His Kingdom. Amen.