

**Pentecost C12**

**August 7, 201**

**Luke 12:22-40**

**“Little Flock”**

**Central Presbyterian Church, Montclair**

**David Noble**

This past Thursday, the youth group mission trip spent the day working at a unique ministry called “Equipping the Saints.” I’ll let the youth tell you about that ministry when they report to you this fall about their trip. But I will say our work that day included packing boxes with clothes. Later that day we realized that most of the clothes we had packed had been donated by one little church in the area. We sorted hundreds of pounds of their clothing donations and we wondered how many clothes we have at home ourselves.

Closets full. Drawers full. Boxes in the attic full. So many clothes we sometimes can’t decide what we should wear. And we shop for more. Are we anxious? Jesus says, ***“Do not worry about your life... Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even (King) Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them.”***

“Your Father knows.” God knows you, loves you, cares for you.

We get caught up in what we need, what we want. We get caught up in mission trips and doing good in the world. Will we get those homeless people taken care of? Will we cover the bills at the church this year? How can we make sure the community knows we are here and we want to meet their needs? We worry and fret.

But God knows, God sees, God provides.

I learned this the hard way in seminary. I was not working- just going to school. We were paying rent, buying food, raising two children. Thank goodness tuition was covered, but there was so much more. Income did not equal expenses. No month was balanced. But every month for three years someone sent us a check that was just enough to do the job. Sometimes it was someone we knew and sometimes it was a person who surprised us with a gift out of nowhere. But our needs were taken care of. Nothing to worry about.

Yes, we don’t need everything we want, but we are so loved, so esteemed, so adored. God is devoted to our well-being.

Listen to how Jesus puts it:

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

Did you know you have a nickname? You are “Little Flock.” Jesus is like a big brother who has his arm around you as you walk down the street at night, looking out for you, protecting you, talking with you as you head home together.

“Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Not like a graduation diploma for classes finished and good grades received. Not like the bank giving you the title to your home after you have made 360 monthly payments. Not like when we say ‘I love you’ after someone has said they love us. No, the kingdom of God is a gift we have received, just because.

This gift of the kingdom is in your hands today. No need to say, “I hope to go to heaven someday,” because heaven is yours already. That’s what Jesus means when he says it is God’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. The word “give” that Jesus uses really means “has given.” You are beloved. You are wealthy with God’s kingdom that has already been given to you.

Then Jesus says,

***“Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them.”***

Be ready. Be ready for the moment when Jesus comes and says, “I have work for you today.” This passage isn’t about Heaven someday, it’s about Earth today. “When I come to you and ask you to help, be ready” Jesus says.

This past week the youth group had a schedule for each day. First we thought we would work at the local animal shelter, then we would help a victim of spouse abuse move her belongings into a special shelter. But the plans fell apart. The agencies were unable to use us and other work was substituted. Yard work.

It was 90 degrees in the Virginia sun and the humidity all week never dipped below 95%. It rained every day. I’ll let the youth group describe those days of unexpected weed pulling and raking and trimming on hillsides and woods and in bushes up to their waists. But the group did not rebel. I’m not going to say it was easy, but when the call came to put on the gloves and wade into what seemed to be a jungle, they did it. They did it with gusto, with maturity. Most of what we did during the week had a surprising twist to it, something we didn’t expect to be so demanding.

I am glad to say that your youth group inspired another youth group who was working with them to also accept the challenge, and working alongside them, started to do some good work themselves.

God dignifies us by giving us the kingdom, right away. Then, God comes calling to invite us to work in the kingdom, to dignify others through our service and mission.

“Be alert,” Jesus says. Pay attention and see where you’re needed. Get up and lend a hand without being asked, without being rewarded, without being recognized, without complaining that it wasn’t what you thought you were going to do.

I saw Emma being quietly generous with a stranger as well as organizing our youth to work together on the first day’s challenge. I saw Roald offer to help without being asked. I saw Juliette pounding away at roots and vines with her shovel, and Ellie taking hold of a hand truck and loading it with 120 lbs of boxes and wheeling it up a ramp into a tractor trailer, and Kara walking about a foot above the ground from branch to branch on a slope of evergreen bushes in order to pull out 50 feet of unwanted vines, and I saw CeCe checking her blood sugar then plunging back into the work she was doing.

They were ready. They answered the call. They did what Jesus asks us all to do. Our call to serve is coming. Let’s be ready to go like our youth were this past week.