

Faith, Fear, and Family
Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
August 7, 2016
Rowland Van Es

Text: Genesis 15:1-6
Luke 12:32-40

What are you afraid of? Don't be afraid/Fear Not (KJV).

The first words in both the OT lesson and the Gospel lesson today are "don't be afraid." In Gen 15 God tells Abram, do not be afraid, I am your shield, your reward shall be very great. In Luke 12 Jesus tells the disciples, do not be afraid, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Don't be afraid; but we are afraid. We're afraid of many things: of terrorism & cyber-crime, we're afraid of getting sick or getting shot. In America people are afraid of running out of money in the future, but in Africa people worry about how to get through each day, since most people live on just \$2 a day or less...

In the context of Gen 15, Abram is worried about not having a proper heir for his estate, for without a son, the only male left to inherit is his servant, Eliezer of Damascus. So God promises Abram again (for the 3rd time) that he will have a son, that he will have as many offspring as the stars. And we believe that we are part of that promise. Christians, Jews, Muslims all claim Abraham as their spiritual father.

Of course just being a part of Abraham's family does not get rid of all our problems. In Abraham's family, the children of Ishmael fought with the children of Isaac (up to today the Jews & Arabs are still fighting). In Isaac's family, the children of Esau (the Edomites) fought with the children of Jacob (the Israelites). Even within Jacob's family, the children of Rachel thought they were better than Leah's children.

Among the 12 tribes of Israel, those living in the S. always thought they were better than those up in the North. Within the S, those W of the Jordan thought they were better than those E of it. By the time of Jesus, all Jews thought they were better than any *Samaritan* (So Jesus shocks them with the Good Sam).

Human nature has not changed very much over the last 4,000 years. In Holland they used to say "if you ain't Dutch you ain't much." Now in the 2016 campaign we are arguing about who is and who isn't a real American, whether Mexican-Americans or Muslim-Americans are real American's and whether black lives matter. Really? Why are we still debating this?

Because some people are afraid, they want to send other people home. Because people are afraid, they want to keep refugees out. It happens both here in America and in Kenya. When we are afraid there isn't enough to go around, we start kicking people out. If bad things happen, just blame the "foreigners."

In the context of Luke 12, Jesus is talking about who & what to be afraid of and how & why they are not to be anxious about any of those things... In vv. 22-31 Jesus tells them don't worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens... Consider the lilies... So don't worry about clothes or food, God knows you need them, seek the kingdom and these other things will be given to you as well.

An example of someone who did not worry, and who trusted God to supply all her needs is our student Winnie. After HS, Winnie wanted to study theology but her father did not support her. Saying teaching would pay better. She went anyway and God gave her a job at RITT. After finishing there with a Saint Paul's diploma, she was determined to go get a Saint Paul's BD degree, even though the RCEA does not yet ordain women. She had no money but came anyway and got a work-study scholarship working with our program in ICMR. After graduating, a church in Nairobi, where her husband is an evangelist, hired her to work with women, and do many things for the denomination. God is good all the time...

In Luke 12: 32-34 Jesus tells the disciples don't be afraid, God is pleased to give you the kingdom. Then: Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses that won't wear out, a treasure in heaven that won't be exhausted, or stolen or destroyed, for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

All this comes right after the parable of the "Rich Fool" who didn't know what to do with his big bumper harvest, except build bigger barns to keep it all for himself, so he could eat drink and be merry all alone.

He was a fool because he was supposed to share his surplus with his needy neighbors, doing that would be treasure in heaven. Instead, he died with nothing there. He should have remembered Prov. 19 says, "Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord." And that Lev 19 says: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Heb. 11 tells us that faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not yet see... By faith, Ab when called to go, he obeyed and went even though he did not know where he was going (kind of like us going to the Gambia 2000 OR our students going wherever their bishop posts them). By faith, Ab made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country (kind of like us living as resident aliens in Kenya OR like our Kenyan students who go to work in South Sudan).

By faith, Ab even though he was old and Sarah was barren, they were enabled to become parents because they considered God faithful who had made the promise. So from Ab came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky (as promised Gen 15) and as countless as the sand on the seashore (as promised in Gen 13). By faith, Winnie got her BD. By faith SPU has grown from 20 teaching 200 to 200 teaching 4000.

By faith, we are sure of Jesus' return and certain of what we do not yet see... God's will being done 100% here on earth just as it is in heaven: When God will dwell with us and we shall see God and be with God. In the meantime, what do we do? We watch & wait, and while we wait, we take care of each other. We serve each other as fellow servants, stewards of our one master, the owner of all the good gifts we have

The challenge in our text is to “not be afraid” of running out of jobs or food or money. The challenge is to be more **inclusive**, less **exclusive**. Fear makes us **exclusive** (keeping more for ourselves, giving less to others). Faith makes us **inclusive**: giving more to the poor, trusting God to repay us. Christians know we are blessed to be a blessing and God has given some of us more now to share with those who have less.

God called Abraham and blessed Abraham so that all peoples on earth would be blessed by God through him. Abraham eventually believed in God’s promise and was given a son. But the children of Abraham, they forgot they were blessed to be a blessing. They forgot about being a **light** to the nations, that God wanted a highway from Egypt to Assyria, so all people could know God & worship God together as one.

Jews, Christians, and Muslims, we are all descendants of Abraham, the father of **many** nations, and God wants to bless each of us. The family of God is not limited to one ethnic group or another. As I told the kids, God has 7 B children and each one is precious in God’s sight. God loves all the children of the world and wants to bless all human families with food, clothing, shelter, and with faith as well.

At **SPU**, students study to be servants of God and humanity. SP’s mission is for all graduates to go on and serve the church and society, by being ministers or teachers or business people. Working as journalists, counsellors or development workers. There is so much work to be done in K, a rich country with a lot of poor people, a country of young people, which will double in 25 years to 90M! Please pray for Kenya...

At **SPU**, students study sign language so they can talk to those who are deaf. Other students study Islam so they can talk to their Muslim neighbors and share the gospel without offense. At SP’s, some get Gov’t loans, some get scholarships, some just come with faith like Winnie and find work. Now she helps others

What about here at Hope Church in Holland, MI? We were blessed to be a blessing and we have blessed many over the years and are supporting several good projects now. Thanks for supporting RCA global missions: Us, Alexanders, Vis’s, and Krebs. Our building project is supposed to make us more accessible. But is even all that enough? How can we do just a little bit more locally & globally? Are we facing the future with faith or with fear? Abraham believed and it was credited to him as righteousness.

Jesus tells us to sell our possessions and give to the poor, to provide purses that won’t wear out, a treasure in heaven that won’t be exhausted. When we give to the poor, we are giving to God. And Christ is always coming to us in the face of the poor. So, what’s in your wallet? How much treasure can you give to your needy neighbors? Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Is yours with God?

Friends, don’t be afraid. *Fear not*, for God is with us always. God is our shield and defender and friend. *Fear not*, you shall be fishers of men. *Fear not*, believe and you will be healed; *Fear not*, you are worth more than sparrows, *Fear not*, little flock, God is pleased to give you the kingdom and God has (so share your possessions with the poor) *Fear not*, J said, I am the first & the last. (All God’s people said: **Amen**.)