

Mount Olive Lutheran Church  
5327 W. Washington Blvd.  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53208-1798

The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost  
August 12, 2007  
Luke 12:22-34

## *"Fear Not!"*

by Pastor Mark E. Wangerin

### Introduction

The last time I preached on this text, I began my sermon by discussing the question whether we live in "an age of fear." I pointed out that there were a lot of things that were troubling people. I talked about the violence in the city (no different there) and the fear of disease (pretty much the same) and that there were continuing concerns about the violence and instability in the Middle East. But as I looked back at the introduction to that sermon it seems so insignificant now. For you see the date I preached it was Sunday, August 26, 2001. Sixteen days from that Sunday would change a lot of things. Tuesday, September 11, 2001—there was more than enough fear to go around. I cannot get out of my mind the pictures of the citizens of New York fleeing for their lives as the twin towers came crashing down behind them. It is most assuredly an age of fear, though many would like to put that thought from their minds. In light of these thoughts the Scripture readings for today are most assuring. Indeed, on the basis of the words of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospel lesson today we have as our theme, "Fear Not."

### I. The Word of Jesus

Jesus said, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Jesus here offers words of comfort to his people. Note that he does not call them strong and self-reliant heroes. He calls them (and us) "little flock". We are the sheep of his pasture, the lambs in his hand. We are very much like a little flock, surrounded by wolves and other predators, but protected by the Good Shepherd. The imagery of this little sentence is very fitting. It is the Father who gives us the kingdom. It is the Father whose good pleasure has accomplished this. And so we see that we can not take any credit for these things. Our fears are relieved by the work of God for us in His Son our Savior. And so it is that in the Gospel Jesus continues by encouraging his disciples to sell their possessions, to be dependent on things that will not wear out and a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted. As Jesus says, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

The thoughts of these words follow closely on the theme from last week where we were reminded by the parable of the rich fool that we should not place our hope in the things of this world. For the things of this world pass away. Indeed, the words which closely follow the close of the gospel lesson for today are a reminder of the return of the Lord in glory. "The Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him." And again for this reason we should not be afraid.

Jesus in his ministry often reminded his disciples that they need not be afraid. "Peace I leave

with you, my peace I give unto you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." In faith in our Savior we can truly find the hope to overcome the fears and trials of this life. As Jesus said in the words which begin the Gospel for this day, "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. ... Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these." (Luke 12:22-29) And so it is that Scripture is full of examples of exhortation to us: The Lord is my light and my salvation--whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life--of whom shall I be afraid? (Psalm 27:1) The prophet Isaiah also says: "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (Isaiah 43:1) For the word of the Lord has come to us: "Do Not Be Afraid!"

## II. The Other Lessons Also Say, "Do Not be Afraid"

The other Scripture lessons for this day speak similarly.

As the Old Testament Lesson reminds us, we move from fear to faith. The Lord's word to Abram was "Do not be afraid. I am your shield, your very great reward." This in spite of the fact that Abram was fearful of the future for he had no heir but his servant. But the promise of the Lord to Abram was of the seed and heir who would be his. He would have a child and not leave his inheritance to his servant. The response of Abram was faith. "Abram believed the Lord and he credited it to him as righteousness." That is also so much a part of our lives in these times. We often do not see. We must believe. For is not that what the writer to the Hebrews tells us in the beginning of the great chapter on faith, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." He relates the stories of the faithful patriarchs of old. He reminds us of the faith of Abel and Noah. He recalls the faith of Abraham, who though a stranger in a foreign country looked forward to the city with foundations, whose builder and maker is God. It is hard to imagine what it must have been like for Abraham to leave all that he knew behind him and follow the leading of God to go to a strange land, though it was the land of promise.

We too may often find ourselves wondering just where God is leading us. In our lives upon this earth, the places we must go may not always be the most inviting. There indeed will be darkness and worry, fear and trembling along the way. But the Lord reminds us that we too hear the promise. We follow in the footsteps of those who have gone before us. We know where the path leads. For it leads to the heavenly country--the new Jerusalem. It leads us to the throne of the king. "Come O Blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom which was set out for you from before the foundation of the world." That is the victory. That is the promise. That is our sure hope. And Jesus words to us "Fear Not" apply to all the moments of our life. The big things and the little things, all our fears.

Conclusion

There is one last point to be made concerning the words of our text. That has to do with their connection with the hymn we sang just before the sermon. I have stood several times in the past years before a simple stone slab placed near the main altar of St. Mary's Church in Wittenberg. The stone simply said, "Gustaf Adolf II 1632". When I inquired about it, the tour guide informed our group that at that spot the casket of King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden had been placed during a memorial service following his death at the battle of Lützen on November 9, 1632 during the Thirty Years' War. Now what is interesting about that is this. On the morning of the battle, the king gave the watchword for the day to the commanders of the army, "God is with us." He also knelt in prayer with his court chaplain as the assembled host sang the hymn we sang today as well, "O Little Flock fear not the foe." And then as the kettledrums of the army played the hymns of Martin Luther, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God" and "May God Embrace Us With His Grace," the army marched into battle. The king fell that day. In sorrow that night, the army again sang the hymn, "Do Not Despair, O Little Flock." But the victory belonged to the Evangelical army, an event which according to most scholars preserved the Reformation for generations yet to come. We often speak of the battle in high and lofty terms, as a spiritual struggle. Sometimes it is a real battle. And the words of the hymn, most probably written by the court chaplain of Gustavus Adolphus himself and based upon the prose words of the king, speak eloquently. Just as eloquently as the stone slab beside the altar of the LUTHERAN church of St. Mary in Wittenberg.

For the word of the Lord still speaks to us, "Do Not Be Afraid" By the grace of God we will never need to stand upon a battlefield as did those faithful soldiers so many years ago beside their pious and noble king. But we sang the song they sang upon the battlefield before and may we ever sing it:

O little flock, fear not the foe  
Who madly seeks your overthrow;  
Dread not his rage and pow'r.  
And though your courage sometimes faints,  
His seeming triumph o'er God's saints  
Lasts but a little hour.

As true as God's own Word is true,  
Not earth nor hell's satanic crew  
Against us shall prevail.  
Their might? A joke, a mere facade!  
God is with us and we with God—  
Our vict'ry cannot fail.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding, mount guard like a sentinel over your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, to life everlasting. Amen.