

My niece, Dawn Michelle, recently gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. Shortly after Aura was born Dawn shared a picture of Aura, laying on Dawn's chest, sound asleep. Dawn Michelle wrote "moments like these I wish would last forever."

Her comment brought back memories. It took me back to my first few days with my first born, Sam. I was holding him in that same exact position and I remember whispering to him "I will protect you from all harm and won't let anything hurt you."

Sadly, after time, I realized I could never live into that promise. No matter how hard I tried, by the time I had my daughters, I had come to the realization, I did not have the power to protect my children from the hurts of this world. I could only walk with them through those hurts.

Although I could not keep my promise my children can find comfort knowing I will walk with them through their hurts. I will listen; sometimes I will offer unsolicited advice; sometimes I will say the wrong thing... but, if they reach out, I will make myself available to them. I believe they find this comforting and this comfort helps them to have strength.

Our scripture, today, begins with Jesus' words of comfort: "Have no fear little flock." One of the pastors I study scripture with is from Tonga. He has been a Methodist pastor for many years however, his first sermon in English was only four years ago. When we study together Sione will often get fixated on the English. This week he was fixated on the "little flock" and how it feels to be referred to as a "child" or "little" by Jesus. He wondered if it wasn't somewhat condescending. This conversation caused us to dig a little deeper. Digging deeper those of us with English as our first language unanimously concluded: This words are not at all condescending. Comforting? Encouraging? Most definitely.

If you would like I invite you to dig a little deeper with me and open your pew bibles to Luke chapter 12. I think you can find it on page 64 in the back of the bible. Let's look at what Jesus says BEFORE Jesus makes implores us to "have no fear little flock."

As we heard last week, from Pastor Stacey there was a man, who was listening to Jesus, had asked Jesus to tell his brother to divide the inheritance with him. Jesus' response was to tell the story of a rich man who was so caught up in himself about his great harvest that he failed to see the bigger picture ... that this great harvest was not going to add even one hour to his life, and that, perhaps, the man should think about greater things than this one big harvest.

Now let's go to verse 22 let's read how Jesus follows up on this.

<sup>22</sup> Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. <sup>23</sup> For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. <sup>24</sup> Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they

have no storeroom or barn; yet GOD feeds them. And how much more **valuable** you are than birds! <sup>25</sup> Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life<sup>[b]</sup>? <sup>26</sup> Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?

<sup>27</sup> “Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. <sup>28</sup> If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! <sup>29</sup> And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. <sup>30</sup> For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. <sup>31</sup> But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

Personally I like how Eugene Peterson interprets this in the Message bible: <sup>25-28</sup> “Has anyone by fussing before the mirror ever gotten taller by so much as an inch? If fussing can’t even do that, why fuss at all? Walk into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They don’t fuss with their appearance—but have you ever seen color and design quite like it? The ten best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them. If God gives such attention to the wildflowers, most of them never even seen, don’t you think he’ll attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you?”

<sup>29-32</sup> “What I’m trying to do here is get you to relax, not be so preoccupied with *getting* so you can respond to God’s *giving*. People who don’t know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep yourself in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. You’ll find all your everyday human concerns will be met. Don’t be afraid of missing out. You’re my dearest friends! The Father wants to give you the very kingdom itself.

When Jesus says “Have no fear little flock” he is teaching us a new way of being... Jesus is helping us to remember who God is and who we are to God. We are God’s dearest creation; God’s children and God only wants to provide for our every need.

God finds great joy in protecting us and giving us what we need. God wants to GIVE us God’s kingdom but God can’t do this unless WE trust God and allow God to do what gives God joy. God wants us to relax and not be so preoccupied with getting that we fail to realize and respond to God’s giving.

To realize and respond to God’s giving IS faith!

Faith can be difficult in our world. We live in a world of expectations. I am the first to admit that one of my greatest fears is to fail to meet the expectations of others. I don’t want like to disappoint others. When I whispered to my son I would never let him be harmed... that was an expectation I put on myself; he did not do it; yet often times I have felt I let him, and his sisters down. I worried about it and I don’t think I am the only one who does this. Am I right?

Who here has not worried about disappointing a parent, a child, a friend or a boss? Who here has not “gone the extra mile” to prove worthiness; often times to the point of exhaustion and emptiness for never quite measuring up? We put all of this effort into getting this recognition; getting the affirmation that we are good enough that it is often to the detriment of the relationship. The relationship with those who are nearest and dearest to us AND the relationship with the one who created us; the One who can protect us; the One who will never fail to meet our expectation; our Creator in heaven.

Often times we are so busy trying to meet impossible expectations we neglect the one relationship that can carry us through those times when we fail; the relationship of our faith. Yet, if we nourish the relationship of our faith FIRST, Jesus promises all the rest will fall into place. The key to a “relaxed” life; a kingdom life; is this ultimate relationship.

Our God, who finds joy in giving even gives us the way to nourish our faith relationship; prayer, worship, and God’s Word. Yet, I know while it sounds quite simple... due to the worldly expectations, nourishing our faith relationship can be quite difficult. We often neglect our faith relationship because we are too busy trying to meet the expectations and demands of others. Often we even begin to think meeting these demands first is what we HAVE to do.

We respond to those who chide “You can’t skip worship; I NEED you to.. you fill in the blank... after all aren’t good followers of Christ SUPPOSED to help others? We fall into the trap of supposed to’s and need to’s forgetting how freely everything is given to us. We often find ourselves falling into bed exhausted forgetting that we have gone through the day without talking to God; without noticing everything God has given us during the day. We forget everything God gives us freely and it is only due to these free gifts that we are able to give freely... not because we are “supposed to.”

It is God’s good pleasure to give in order that we CAN give to others but we are unable to realize God’s good giving if we fail to nourish our faith relationship. God enjoys giving us the ability to slow down and begin our day in prayer. God enjoys providing for our every need in order that we have time to HEAR this good news by studying God’s Word; God finds great pleasure in sustaining our faith through worship that we can relax and remember we don’t have to do it all by ourselves. God promises to give us the tools and the people that we can relax and not have to worry about those expectations.

Seek first the kingdom of God that you may enjoy God’s pleasure in giving to you and see how the rest of your life begins to fall into place.

Let us pray: Good and giving God slow us down. Slow us down to experience the joy you find in providing for our every need. Slow us down to nourish our faith. Slow us down, calm our fears, that we may find joy in giving to others as you have given to us. Slow us down to be a part of your kingdom here and your kingdom to come. Amen.

## Children's Sermon

What is a treasure:

What do I have here? My grandson would call this a treasure box. He sees a box like this and automatically asks "what's in it?" He wants to find a treasure. Often times he finds things to put in a treasure box... then he tries to find a lock it. Why do you think he locks it?

Have you ever made a treasure box? What do you put in your treasure box?

Should we look and see what is in this treasure box?

Oh look! It is empty! Does that mean I have no treasures? Does it mean a thief has stolen my treasure?

No it doesn't. You want to know why? Because God gives us some treasures that no one can steal. This is good news! These are treasures we have in our hearts. We love other people like Mom and Dad and nobody can steal that love out of our hearts.

How about happiness? Happiness is in our hearts. Happiness may come from good memories. Maybe we remember holidays or other happy events that have happened. No thief can ever steal those memories. What are happy things you remember?

Best of all we know that Jesus loves us and we feel that love in our hearts. No thief can ever take Jesus' love from us. So we do have quite a few treasures that are safe from thieves, safe in our hearts don't we?

Let us pray: Dear God

Thank you that we have so many treasures that are safe from thieves.

Thank you for the love we have in our hearts.

Thank you for memories.

Thank you for Jesus.

Amen.