"Don't be afraid." How many times have we heard those words in our lifetime? Our parents whispered them: Don't be afraid of: thunder, darkness, branches scraping against the window. Don't be afraid of: striking out on the ball field, flunking your physics exam, or your driver's test. When those words are spoken with love and sincerity, they can be some of the most soothing words we could ever hope to hear. "Don't be afraid, I'm here with you. You're go­ing to be all right. I love you. Stop worrying. Don't be anxious." They are wonderful words when spoken by a loved one. I'm here ... "Don't be afraid."

Jesus says to his disciples "Do not be afraid." Besides our par­ents' voices, where have we heard those words before? In the Bible alone we hear them over fifty times from the Lord speaking to Abram in Genesis (15:1) to the book of Revelation (1:17) we hear them over and over. It seems to be one of God's favorite things to say to us: "Do not be afraid."

Not once does the Bible say, “Worry about it.” “Stress over it.” Or “Figure it out.” But over and over it says “Trust God. Do not be afraid.”

In the verses right before our gospel passage this morning Jesus instructed his disciples not to worry about food or clothes; that they should consider how well God takes care of birds and flowers and grass and he tells them not to be anxious about such things but to "set [their] minds on [God's] king­dom and the rest will come to [them] as well" (12:31). If the dis­ciples are going to continue to follow him they have no reason to worry about the things that they need. They are not to fret about their lives, their food, or their clothes. "Think," he says to them, "about how well God cares for the birds and the flowers and stop your worrying. Quit spending so much of your time fussing about these things. Instead," he says, "set your hearts on the kingdom and these other things will come along just fine."

Then, in the gospel for today, Jesus steps it up a notch. He repeats that they don't need to be afraid since it gives their Father great pleasure to hand over the kingdom to them. He goes on to say, "Sell what you have, give to those who need it more than you, and focus your lives on things that do not rot or wear out and can't be stolen. That's where you will find your treasure."

Now, let me say this. I don’t think that God is asking us to sell everything we have and give it to the poor. Let me share with you one of the struggles I have as a pastor. As I read Scripture, I come upon these very difficult sayings, “Sell all you have and give it to the poor.” And it is sometimes difficult to gain perspective on such a difficult saying without undermining the authority of the Scriptures and what they may be saying. What I believe is that Jesus is setting a standard here.

But I don’t think that this is the standard for all Christians. I think it is a standard for the disciples who are hearing it spoken. God does ask certain people to sell everything because they have been called into Christian mission. I am sure that God asks certain people to do this even today. But I don’t find Jesus making this a standard with everyone He meets. We all remember Zacchaeus for his small stature and his climbing the Sycamore Tree. We may or may not remember him for the tall stature of his attitude and what happened in his home. Out of the blue, during the meal, he says to Jesus, I will sell half of everything I own give it to the poor, and if I have wronged anyone, I will pay them back fourfold. Do you remember Jesus’ response? What He didn’t say was, no, you must sell everything Zacchaeus. No, He said “no greater faith exists in all of Israel.”

There **is** a standard, but it is not selling everything you have. Here is the standard: How much time do you spend worrying about storing up treasures on earth vs. how much time do you spend storing up treasures in heaven? He is asking His followers, all of us, not just the disciples, to adopt a way of life that is not rooted in the securities of this world. But what about…?

Can't you just hear Jesus now? "Haven't you been listening? I told you that God will take care of your needs. And since you won't have to be fussing around worrying about such things, you can attend to the work of the kingdom, which, in case you've forgot­ten, is breaking in as we speak."

Honestly, isn't this getting a bit monotonous? Last week, right here in church, we heard Jesus telling us the parable of the rich man who tore down his old, inadequate barns and built new ones to house his abundant crop. We get it Jesus. Don't hoard our goods, sell what we have, give to the poor; let our Father in heaven take care of us. We get it already. We really do. We understand what you're trying to tell us. But, honestly, we aren't too sure if we're ready to take that step. It's a big step, Jesus. You understand, don't you?

There is a story of a businessman visiting a beau­tiful tropical island. Upon seeing a fisherman unloading a mod­est catch of fish asked him what he was going to do the rest of the day. "I will sit with my family, talk with my children, spend time with my wife, and cook supper."

The businessman told him that he ought to hire some men to help him.

"Why?" the fisherman asked.

"You could catch more fish," he replied.

"But why would I want to catch more fish?"

"So that you could make more money and buy more boats."

"But why do I need more boats?"

"So that you can have other people do your fishing for you."

"And why would I want to have other people do my fishing for me?"

"So that you could take time off, go to some exotic place for vacation, spend time with your wife and children ... **oh!**" and the businessman walked away re-evaluating his own life while the fish­erman took his catch to market and spent the rest of his day with his family.

Jesus said that where our treasure is there our hearts will be also. I believe he was talking about the fundamental orientation of our lives. What is most important to us? I used to repeat this saying backward. It made more sense to me: where your *heart* is there your *treasure* will be also. I thought he was saying that our money would follow our heart's desires. Put your money where your heart is. I suppose that, too, is true. But it's not what Jesus said. He was saying to us that the money goes toward something first and then our heart will follow.

I think these words had special significance to the early church. Get your life in order, rely on God for the things that you need, give yourself an attitude adjustment because Jesus is coming again, and you darn well better be ready. We just don't know when. It has a lot more weight than the bumper sticker I saw a few years ago, "Jesus is coming back ... look busy." This misses the point. A longer, more correct bumper sticker could read, "Jesus is coming, don't be afraid, sell what you have, give to the poor, put your wealth where you want your heart to be." That's closer to the point but it's a bit too long to be read at 55 miles an hour.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, you have told us to not be afraid, to give away what we have, and rely on the Father for everything. You had to know that this would be a difficult directive for us, especially those of us who have trusted mainly in ourselves and the money and possessions we've acquired through our own hard work. We sometimes find it difficult to say, "All things come of thee, O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee" except at the offertory. Help us not to dismiss your words as naive or as a message meant for others but instead help us to see where it is that we put our treasure and where our heart follows. May we choose wisely where we put our money and our talents and our time and may these be used more and more for the sake of your kingdom where you live with the Father and the Holy Spirit, world without end. Amen.