

This message was delivered by Rev. Pamela Graf Short to the gathered community of Tontogany on the occasion of the Tontogany Festival Worship Service, Sunday, August eleven, in the year of our LORD two thousand and nineteen. The people named in the sermon come from Calvary United Methodist Church, Tontogany Presbyterian Church and American Legion Post 441. As you listen or read consider those folks in your own lives who have unveiled the kingdom of God to you.

Luke 12:32-40

32"Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

33 Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.

34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

35 "Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit;

36 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.

37 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.

38 If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.

39 "But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into.

40 You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

Is our Bible story for today about heaven or earth?

Is it about grace or works?

About God's delight or our treasures?

I think I'll check "all of the above".

The words of Jesus given in Luke are among the most tender of all of Jesus' messages to us:

Do not be afraid, Little Flock.

Do not be afraid.

It pleases God to give you a beautiful gift;

a gift so broad it cannot be measured.

A gift so valuable it cannot be stamped with a bar code.

A gift so indestructible it will not wear out

or rust out

or burn out.

It cannot be

chewed by moths

or lifted by thieves.

Do not be afraid, Little Flock,

it is your heavenly parent's delight to give you the Kingdom.

I would like to suggest that as surely as the kingdom stretches into heaven and reaches into eternity, it is present here and now in Tontogany.

Like a sweater that is buried under a pile of sweaters
or a flashlight that was put on the wrong shelf,
the Kingdom of God is sometimes hidden from our eyes.
But don't be afraid, Little Flock,
for hidden is not the same as absent.
And according to Jesus' message,
we just might find something as mysterious as the Kingdom of God when we do something as practical as sell a
few sweaters and give the money to the Otsego kids for school supplies.
We just might find a piece of glory sitting right in front of us when we help a child sew a bag
or play a game
or make a bird house.

Do not be afraid, Little Flock.
Do not be afraid just because
businesses have closed
and fields are barren
and people have disappeared from the pews.
For the Kingdom of God in Tontogany is not measured
in receipts
or bushels
or membership rolls,
but in love and honor,
hospitality and service.

The treasure found in the Kingdom of God is jingling in the pockets of Patti Wires as she lovingly tends to Rita
and checks up on Kenny.
The treasure found in the Kingdom of God tips the scale when Jackie Shank and Margy DeLuca instruct one
more child
and offers one more word of encouragement
and one more act of respect.
The treasure found in the Kingdom of God is mined like gold when Sam Downard paints a mural
and Thelma Wires scopes up noodles
and Arla Mae mows a neighbor's lawn
and Dick Conrad says a prayer.
The treasure found in the Kingdom of God multiplies like stocks when
Otsego teachers act with dignity toward their students and youth blend their voices at a Baccalaureate service
and the Festival committee provides one more year of celebration for the children; yes, for the children.
The treasure found in the Kingdom of God glistens in the smile of Marsha Brodright like a lamp lit and ready
for Christ's return.

Do not be afraid Little Flock for the kingdom is no less the kingdom just because the Monarch is gone for a
time to another country or territory or realm.
Like a child who panics when he cannot see his mother, though she listens for his every cry,
we find it easy to forget that we are beloved citizens of God's kingdom.
We find it easy to forget that the Holy Spirit is near and Christ is planning to return with a feast that is
exceedingly, abundantly, above all we could ask or imagine.

I am struck that in this particular story,
the return of the Monarch is not marked by natural disasters as it is in the Gospel of Matthew,
but the return of the Monarch is marked by the readiness of the people
and the readiness of the Master whose first act is to serve.

If we are to uncover the hidden Kingdom of God in Tontogany;
if we are to prepare this particular place for Christ's return, then consider each day, Little Flock,
what you personally can do to prepare it.
Are you on village council? Then see to it that new people are welcomed into the village as you would
welcome Jesus. Make it easy for them to build new homes and plant new trees.
Are you a member of a church? Then see to it that you honor the efforts of your fellow members like you
would honor Christ. Give a word of encouragement to each new ministry.
Are you a scout? Then speak with dignity to strangers, especially when they look a bit offbeat. For who
knows? Christ comes in many disguises.

Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds
alert when he comes.

Little Flock! Little Flock!
You can choose fear, or you can choose faith.
You can choose to lock up your ideas of what Tontogany was or is or really ought to be;
or you can open the door for the One who knocks and carries in packages of hopeful imagination, streaming in
from a place of love.

Do not be afraid, Little Flock,
For you are God's treasure; you are God's delight;
And it is God's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.
Let God's Kingdom come!
Let God's will be done in Tontogany as it is in heaven.

Now Little Flock,
May our God who holds you as a treasure
The One who delights in giving you the Kingdom
Wait for you in faith
Dress you in honor
Ignite you in love
And serve you in
wonder,
holiness,
joy
and
peace
now and for a thousand generations!

