

Sermon – Luke 12:32-40
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Grace Lutheran Church
9 Pentecost – Year C
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“Ready, Not Afraid”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. This past week was full of great moments. For one thing, I managed to win three out of four legs of the Lyle Family Annual Door County Miniature Golf Quadruple Cup. Not undefeated, thanks to Anders, but still dominant. But this wasn't the highlight of our family vacation. Nor was the fact that our newly-licensed Greta drove most of the way there. The best moment was when Erika, detained for most of the week with training for her new job, was finally able to join us. We waited up for her, monitoring her progress via phone tracking. When she was near, we walked out into the driveway to welcome her and cheer her arrival. There were hugs and perhaps tears of joy. And then, a dawning realization for the four of us who'd spent several days there already. Someone asked, “Umm, did the door shut?” The doors to our rental home had automatic locks. All week, we had stayed on our guard, making sure we had the keys if we went outside. Now, suddenly, late at night, we found ourselves locked out. The mood shifted. There was an open window whose screen we popped out, thinking Torsten might fit. He didn't, although much to his credit, he did let us try to push him through. Eventually, and perhaps miraculously, Torsten discovered that the side door swung open for him. I swear that door was locked, too, but I've never been one to look a gift horse in the mouth. Vacation joy resumed. But for a few long minutes, due to a momentary lack of focus, our reality shifted and the world around us changed for the worse, locking us out and leaving us fearful.

2. Of course, in that moment we had options. Cars to drive off in, a garage in which to hunker down. But how often does life, seemingly going along just fine, more or less, suddenly throw us curveballs? How often do we lose focus? How often does reality shift underneath our feet, leaving us locked out and afraid? From personal struggles to national turmoil to violence and warfare overseas, we live on unsteady ground. Perhaps no amount of focus or preparation on our part could keep us safe and whole. We are tempted to fear; not only are we tempted, there are some who would prefer us to live in fear, frozen in inaction.

3. Jesus, speaking today to a crowd of thousands, speaks also to us: Do not be afraid, little flock. It is the Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom. In response, Jesus issues a call to readiness. Give what you have for the sake of others. Focus on the things that will not wear out, the things of heaven. Know what true treasure is and live accordingly. And then, in a verse that's launched a thousand stewardship campaigns, Jesus tells us, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Too often we've reduced this to a call to give money. Better, we've included time and talent. But as Mark Allen Powell points out, Jesus is really speaking our whole lives. Stewardship is giving everything we have and everything we are in service to the God from whom we receive everything we have and everything we are. Stewardship is not about giving some percentage of what we have to church and charity and then doing whatever with the rest. It is a call to discipleship, to a life lived 100% for God's good purposes. And how are we to do this? Well, by doing it. By putting our treasure – our lives – in the right places and letting our hearts follow. We have a bad habit of inverting Jesus' words here, thinking he means that our treasure will follow our hearts, our feelings, our good intentions. But Jesus means what he says. Our hearts will follow our treasure. As Powell notes, how we invest our lives does not reveal who we already are; rather, it

determines who we will become as we commit ourselves to lives of discipleship that are both full and faithful.

4. Faithful discipleship is trusting Jesus fully, even and especially when the world is falling apart around us, when we are suddenly on the wrong side of locked doors. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Faith believes that God is bringing the Kingdom even when the kingdoms of this world create such an uproar. Faith trusts the power of God; it does not seek power for itself. The nations, including our own, rage against the coming of God's Kingdom of grace. We see in our own time the very gospel of God being twisted by Christian nationalists and white supremacists who seek to weaponize our faith. Fear not, little flock. Be faithful. We hear voices crying out that the good things of this world are for the few, not the many. That those of different gender or color or creed or status are lesser and should be locked out. Fear not, little flock. Be faithful. There are those who insist that power means warfare, who shrug as the people of Gaza suffer catastrophe beyond comprehension. Fear not, little flock. Be faithful. Remember that in God's Kingdom, power belongs to God alone. Our call is not to power but to people, people to whom we give our lives fully that their lives might be full. That together all would flourish in spite of this world's wanton, wayward ways. In a world that arranges itself by left and right, or languishes in a muddy middle, the church lives from the center that is cross of Christ. Not middle ground between the old ways but holy ground from which emerges God's power – a power that drives toward life and peace and justice. A power of grace to which we give our lives. A graceful power in whose service we live for others. Fear not, little flock, whatever may come. Be faithful.
5. Be fully faithful, for God is faithful to you. God, in Christ, fully gives all that God has to give. Jesus, the treasure of heaven, has been crucified, given up to our sinful world, the heart of God upon the tree of Calvary. The cross of Christ

is not, however, the last word of death. It is the ever-new Word of Life through which the Kingdom breaks into this world, unlocking doors that will one day be knocked down entirely. We do not know when this day will come. Neither do we know what will come in the meantime, what we may need to endure, against what hate we will need to push back with love. But God will come. And God is here. God delights to give the Kingdom, and this world's kingdoms cannot finally thwart God's will. Be faithful and ready. You are a treasure; put your life where it matters. You are forgiven, free, and need never be afraid again. Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.