

*Sermon preached by Revd Rachel McDougall*

*St Paul's Canterbury*

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*Sunday 7 August 2022*

*The assurance of Gift and Giving*

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

Do not be afraid.

What do you fear?

What do you fear?

There is much to be afraid of, the changing nature of the church, decline in the church and its place in society, climate change, sickness, change, loss, Covid, the fear of not having enough, the fear of not being enough, uncertainty about the future.

Do not be afraid little flock. Jesus acknowledges the little flock, that feels its smallness, of being vulnerable and frail yet is his flock.

For it is the Father's good pleasure.

The Father is in relationship with us, is present with us, desires relationship with us. Even more than this God delights out of God's goodness to give to us.

This is what is at the heart of God's being – goodness, love delight. God is the one who gives, who gives to us continually.

It is God's good pleasure to give you all the kingdom.

God gives to us. As Jesus says I came to give life and to give it abundantly.

What does it mean to be given the kingdom, reign of God?

I think it is about God's loving presence, about purpose and meaning and belonging.

The kingdom of God is the buried treasure and the pearl of great price, all that we ultimately long for which is more than material goods or status. It is not something we have power over but are given as a gift.

It is also not an individual thing but given to God's community the church It is God's good pleasure to give '*yous*' all the kingdom.

This verse is reassuring because it serves as a reminder of what is already ours as a gift.

We so easily forget that God has already given us everything we need. God's love is always there for us. The nature of us humans is that we forget, other things get in the way.

We get distracted by fears and uncertainties, by longing for security in power or by possessions or by being right.

We get distracted by being preoccupied with ourselves and what we have and clinging to it.

When life changes it is so easy to look back longingly to a past where all seemed simpler or more certain.

We are particularly vulnerable to this when what we have taken for granted is swept away. Anxiety arises when one can no longer rely on the body in the same way one used to.

(This is something I have found a challenge – impatient for myself to get better to do more things as if my security is based on doing things instead of the gift of being.)

It might be that we are challenged by what is happening to our church and the struggles that it finds itself in divided over one conflict or another.

I grieve when I see people so certain of what the church is supposed to be about who is allowed in and who is not, where to me God's love is for all and it is not up to me to be a gatekeeper but to accept all who come.

It is God's good pleasure to give us all the kingdom, the reign of God. This is what to base our security on, that no matter what else happens what else fails or falls or crumbles God is with us always.

This is something we can set our hearts upon just as Abraham trusted in God enough to set out on a journey where he did not know where he was going.

It has been the same for every generation.

There has never been a time when God's people have precisely known where they were going.

Jesus' disciples thought Jesus was coming to overthrow the empire. They were wrong.

They thought Jesus would return very quickly. He didn't. How were they meant to live in the meantime? They didn't know.

I listened to reflections of a priest this week who has been ordained for 50 years and spoke about the church being very different from the one he was ordained into and the massive

changes that have happened that Christians found their way through, the remarriage of divorcees, a new prayerbook the first since 1662, the ordination of women. He brought the perspective that there will always be issues the church divides over, that wrestles and muddles I's way through.

As a church, as Christians we are continually under reconstruction and reformation.

When our lives or structures seem to be falling apart it is a liminal time in which God is at work to bring forth new life.

As toddlers grow into being children and teenagers grow through a time of uncertainty to adulthood so we all find ourselves in liminal times where we are taken outside of ourselves to see things from a different view point and are called to trust in God and mature in life and faith.

Liminal times are scary but they are opportunities for richness and depth.

When we enter more deeply into the gift of God's love and goodness to us it does change our perspective.

When we look at what we fear and stare into it we realise that it falls away.

When we trust in the reassurance of God being with us we are able to see everything from a different perspective. There is a change in us from grasping at things out of fear to be able to live differently in giving as God has given.

We can change in our attitudes to what we have and keep our focus on the lasting treasure of God's love.

We change from seeing the church as what we have to being about what we can offer others. What are the gifts given to us that we can share that can be of benefit to our local community?

Our perspective is shifted to be open and watchful and alert for what it means for us to be God's faithful people now.

How can we give to others of what we have?

This is the invitation of this reading, to have gratitude for God's gift to us, to name and remember what they are and to share of such riches with others.

Naming our fears is often the starting place for us as we let go into the grace of God's presence and peace.

*How can I explain the riches and treasures and delights found when the soul is united to God in prayer? Since in some way we can enjoy heaven on earth, be brave in begging the Lord to give us his grace in that he shows us the way and strengthen the soul that it may dig until it finds this hidden treasure. The truth is that the treasure lies within our very selves.*

*-Teresa of Avila*

*The Interior Castle*

*Lections:*

*Isaiah 1.1, 10-20*

*Psalms 50.1-8, 23-24*

*Hebrews 11.1-3, 8-16*

*Luke 12.32-40*