

Gospel: Luke 12:32-40

[Jesus said:]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.

³⁴For 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.”

Maybe you’ve heard this story before.

It seems there was a Lutheran pastor who was preaching their first sermon in a new congregation. They were keenly aware that people might form some impressions of them from that first sermon and so they wanted everything to be just perfect.

They worked hard on that first sermon, carefully selecting each word, trying to have just the right tone and the right message.

As the weekend drew near, they started to get a little nervous. Their anxiety increased. They couldn’t sleep Saturday night. They began to think about all of the things that could go wrong. As they lay in bed trying to fall asleep, they wondered what would happen if they tripped on the carpet on the way to the pulpit. Or what if they lost their place in the bulletin? Or what if they dropped their hymnal?

They got to church extra early on that first Sunday. They practiced the whole service. When it came time to speak, they noticed that their voice wasn’t being amplified by the sound system. They panicked. They didn’t know what to do. They leaned forward a bit and they tapped on the microphone. Nothing. They did it again and said, “There is something wrong with this microphone.”

And the congregation replied, “And also with you.”

I love that story because it points out that sometimes we can do things without even thinking. Our responses at church, at home, at work, can be almost automatic. It’s like riding a bike or brushing or teeth or tying our shoes...we can do it without even thinking about each step of the process.

In many ways, that's what Jesus is talking about in today's gospel. Our gospel comes from a series of Jesus' teachings that go back and forth between assuring his listeners and warning them.

"Don't be afraid, little flock, it is your Father's pleasure to give you the kingdom...Be dressed for action...the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

St. Luke presents these assurances and warnings as two branches of the same tree. Don't be afraid, but be expectant. Don't be afraid; but be ready.

Jesus reminds his listeners to not lose focus on what really matters. He reminds them to not live automatically, but to live intentionally. Don't get so focused on temporary things that you lose sight of that which is forever.

Jesus says to "make purses for yourselves that do not wear out" or to value and invest in our spiritual lives and to cherish the things that God values.

There's a book that was written a number of years ago called "The 1 Thing" that tells the story of Craig DeMartino. Craig is a passionate rock climber. He went rock climbing in Rocky Mountain National Park on a fateful day in July twenty years ago. Something went horribly wrong that day.

Because of a mix up in communication with his climbing partner, Craig ended up falling 100 feet and he slammed into the base of the cliff. Climbers call a fall from that distance "the death zone" because that is the usual result.

Through a peculiar set of circumstances rescuers quickly reached Craig and were able to get him to a major trauma center. But because his injuries were so severe, the doctors told his wife that Craig would probably only live one hour.

In the book, these questions are asked, "What does a person do with an hour to live? What's the most important thing? Sometimes it takes an extreme, on the edge moment like this to startle us into facing what is most crucial in life. Distractions melt away. What once seemed important evaporates. With one hour to live, what was the one thing Craig needed?"

As amazing as it, Craig DeMartino survived this terrible accident and today is even able to walk without assistance.

The one thing that Craig needed was is the one thing we all need...a heart-to-heart relationship, a close and growing relationship with the one who gave his life and rose to new life for us, Jesus.

We recently heard the story of Jesus' visit to the home of Martha and Mary. Martha was upset because she was doing all the work. She went to Jesus and said, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

Jesus answered, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset by many things, but only one thing is needed."

Mary had chosen the one thing that is needed and that is a relationship with Jesus.

This week's gospel offers us a wonderful reminder that despite all of the chaos in the world around us, despite the tragedy, the disaster (and I can't help but think of the unimaginable flooding in eastern Kentucky), the

pain, the brokenness, the uncertainty, and the fear, this week's gospel reminds us that we do not have to be afraid because we don't face any of this alone. We have that one thing. We have Jesus. You and I are God's own children claimed by God forever in the waters of Holy Baptism, baptized into the death and into the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and it is God's good pleasure to give us the kingdom. This week's gospel reminds us to keep focused on what really matters...to keep focused on growing in our relationship with Jesus and in our relationships with one another both inside our congregations and with those in the community and the world.

If we were facing a tragedy like Craig DeMartino and had only one hour to live we would tell our family and friends to know how much we love them. We wouldn't waste our time saying "Don't forget the mortgage payment" or "Change the oil." We would say "I love you." Our relationship with Jesus and with one another are what really matter...they are the one thing.

It's easy for congregations to get distracted and off track. Some congregations get mixed up and think that they should be a police station. They want to enforce the laws. They want to make sure people follow a list of do's and don'ts. They make the law and obedience to it their top priority.

Other congregations get mixed up and think they should be a theatre. They focus on a good performance, on highly scripted, rehearsed, and predictable shows. Their top priority becomes filling the seats.

Yet others think they should be a seminary. People lecture. Facts get memorized. Students take notes and pour over texts. Their top priority becomes transferring knowledge. Information about Jesus becomes more important than a relationship with Jesus.

Still others think their congregation should be a museum. They exist to preserve the memories and traditions of the past. Nothing ever changes. The idea of installing velvet ropes around everything so that nothing gets disturbed almost seems appealing.

It's important for us to be intentional about what our top priority is. It's important for the main thing to be the main thing.

In today's gospel, Jesus says, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." More than anything else, may we treasure our relationship with Jesus and our relationships with one another. May that be where our hearts are.

Amen.