

Context: Luke 12: 27-34

Text: Luke 12:32

From Fear To Fullness

I am very honored to be with you this morning. I appreciate Rev. Chi asking me to speak to you, and so very much appreciate his and Mrs. Chi's friendship. From her English class here at your church, my wife brought me a copy of the publicity about the Chinese New Year Celebrations at the Sharpstown Mall. Some of it was in English, but most of it was in Chinese. I could not read a word of the Chinese. Most of you here can do both, and I admire each of you for taking the time to listen to a sermon in English.

My message today comes from Luke 12:32. Jesus has just finished talking to his disciples about the subject of worry, and then says, "*So don't be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the kingdom.*"

The three greatest fears in life are (1) the fear of abandonment; (2) the fear of not being loved; and, (3) the fear of failing. They are such powerful fears that God had to speak very clearly to each of them.

We have a daughter who we adopted from a Catholic hospital in Korea when she was 1 day old. Her name is Valerie and her Korean name is Mi Young Ri. Everyone took special care to love her, keep her safe and secure, and help her to grow up with a lot of self worth. When she was five years of age, she wrote a letter to the sisters at the hospital. The one question on her mind was why did her mother and father leave her behind? She could not understand that if she was such a loved child, why did the ones who gave her life not want her? As long as we can remember, the fear of being left, or abandoned, has been the source of many issues she has faced so far in life.

The fear of abandonment is so powerful that it can cause serious psychological disorders and drive us to any and every means possible to prevent us from feeling like we are all alone in the world. This fear can drive people into unhealthy relationships, unhealthy expectations of other people, and unhealthy worry that robs the body of its health and the soul of its peace. When people try to describe the feeling, they describe it as such a terrifying coldness, fear, and loneliness that they wish they were totally numb or dead. I believe that only God's Spirit can calm this powerful fear.

It is no accident that Jesus spoke to the deep fear of abandonment with His disciples just prior to His crucifixion. In the Gospel of John, (14:18, 27), Jesus says, "*No, I will not abandon you or leave you as orphans in the storm – I will come to you...I am leaving you with a gift-peace of mind and heart! And the peace I give isn't fragile like the peace the world gives. So don't be troubled or afraid.*"

Many people have a picture of hell as being a place that is hot and noisy, and a great big eternal party where no one is really having fun. My picture of hell is a place that is cold and lonely, where a person is banished to be alone for eternity.

When Jesus experienced hell for us on the cross, do you recall His words of terrifying agony? He said, *“My God! My God.” Why have you forsaken me?*” Why did you abandon me like this? Jesus experienced this in our place so we would not have to. He gives us His own Holy Spirit so we never have to be alone in this life. I never want you to forget Jesus’ promise – ***“I will not abandon you or leave you as orphans in the storm. Fear not, little flock for it gives your Father great happiness to give you the kingdom.”***

The second greatest fear is not being loved. E.C. McKenzie said, “The loneliest place in the world is the human heart where love is absent.” It is no accident either that Jesus spoke at length about love in the same discussion with abandonment. Abandonment says you aren’t worthy of living in relationship; loss of love says you aren’t worthy of being a person who is deeply cared for and respected.

How many times have you heard a child cry out in anger, “You don’t love me!” Or a husband or wife say to each other, “You don’t love me anymore.”

When I lived in Japan a number of years ago, I had the honor and privilege of escorting a little old lady who came one day to our military base. Her one mission in life was to do one primary thing. It was to put a human touch to the untouchable in one of the most pitiful places on earth. When she got up to speak to an airfield full of people, she spoke one message – God loves us. And because he loves us we are commanded to love one another. Her message carried such great power that a calming peace covered the crowd like a warm blanket on a cold day. Her name was Mother Teresa.

God loves us to such a degree that He took everything that is unlovable about us and put it on the back of His only Son. He, then, put all that is unlovable and sinful in us away from His memory forever, on a rough wooden cross in a garbage dump in Jerusalem 2000 years ago. God’s love never goes away or changes. In Romans 8, the Apostle Paul said *“nothing will ever be able to separate us from the love of God demonstrated by our Lord Jesus Christ when he died for us.”*

When we hurt and devour one another, we damage people from seeing that love. Because the fear of loss of love is so powerful, Jesus commanded us saying, *“I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Live within my love... I demand that you love each other as much as I love you.”* (Jn.15: 9, 12)

The third great fear is the fear of failure. We live in a 24-hour, 7-day-a-week culture that defines success in terms of how much money we can make, how much power we can gain, and how many things we can collect. The fear of losing a family, a job, our health, and our dreams can keep us fearful day after day.

I was talking to a young man in his early thirties with a wife and small child. He was working very long hours and was exhausted all the time. I asked what was driving him. He said that he believes that if he doesn't drive himself, someone younger and smarter who will work for less money will replace him.

If the fear of abandonment says that you aren't worthy of relationship, and the fear of not being loved says you aren't worthy of care and respect, the fear of failure says you are not worthy of being valued in society.

Jesus responded to this fear through the story of the talents. He gave something of value to each individual to contribute to the good of His people and the society in which we live. He gave us the Holy Spirit to provide the energy and means to use those talents and gifts.

At the end of the story of the talents, Jesus says, *"For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away."* God does not measure success in terms of how much energy we expend or how tired we make ourselves. He measures success by the quality of what we do with the gifts and talents He blessed us with.

The point of this story is that when we do what gives us joy, we invest God's gifts and love into our families and society. God will not only bless those efforts, but also multiply them in the process. If we don't the opposite happens. What we are given begins to dry up and will be taken from us, just like a plant that tries to grow with no water and light.

"So don't be afraid little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom." God's great joy is being able to join with us in relationship, comfort us in our sorrows, forgive us our sins, heal our lives, and work with us to invest our gifts. He wants to bring an uncommon fullness to our very common lives.

"I am leaving you with a gift-peace of mind and heart! And the peace I give isn't fragile like the world gives. So don't be troubled or afraid." (Jn. 14:27) When the three great fears wash over us, bring these words back to mind and know that our great Lord has already overcome them on our behalf. Amen.