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Last Sunday of the Church Year

Luke 12:32-40 - Keep Your Eyes on the Kingdom

11/16-20/22 – Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Beaver Dam, WI

Keep your head down, do what you have to do until it's done, and it'll all be worth it in the end. Everyone hears something like that when they're going through school or sports or a busy season at work. It means keep your eyes focused on what you're doing and concentrate on the task at hand until you accomplish your goal, and don't let anything else distract you or get you sidetracked.

But according to Jesus, that principle doesn't just apply to school, sports, and work. In our Gospel lesson for today, Jesus tells us that the "keep your head down" principle applies also to our spiritual lives as we strive for heaven. It's just that the terminology he uses is flipped. Jesus actually tells you to keep your heads up toward the heavens, and don't let anything else cloud your vision or get in the way. Keep your eyes on the Kingdom, because that will focus your faith and guide your lives of service here in the meantime.

Now as we really start thinking about this text, consider just how well Jesus knows us, and especially our weaknesses. He knows how prone we are to fear for our own wellbeing, to selfishness and self-centeredness about our possessions, and to carelessness about anything outside of our own little world. So what's the first thing he says to us? *"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom."* A little flock is what Jesus calls us. So basically, Jesus says that left to ourselves, we're right to be afraid of the world around us. As far as the rest of the world is concerned, Christianity is a relic of days gone by and something they would be better off without, and the sooner the better. Science and popular culture seem to take special pleasure in attacking the Bible and trying to shake the very foundation of our faith. And while Christianity seems to fade, religions like Islam, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and plain old atheism just seem to keep on gaining steam. Evil is all around us, suffocating us, and that's not even considering the devil's temptations that are constantly at work within all of us. There is much to be afraid of in this world, physically and spiritually, even to the point that we might sometimes wonder how long faithful Christians will be able to stand up against it.

But hear again Jesus' words: *"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom."* Despite being little in size, little in strength, little in influence, and little in significance in the eyes of the

world, we are the apple of our heavenly Father's eye, and there is nothing little about us in his plan for this life and beyond. No, in fact, God chose us specially and made us into his very own flock through the perfect, priceless blood of Jesus Christ, and so we have the certain assurance that we will never lose God's Kingdom, no matter how it looks. If it seems like true Christianity is on the ropes in this life, know that that's only because God's got something better planned for us in the next and he's teaching us to look forward to that. For us, this life isn't some kind of king-of-the-hill power grab, and it's not a race to see who can stockpile the most cars or houses or tvs or bank accounts. We don't have to build a kingdom for ourselves here, because we've got one waiting for us in heaven that's infinitely better.

So don't be afraid of what happens around you or how threatening any of it looks, and try not to get caught up in your worries and troubles, because while they may be unpleasant right now, they're just momentary. Keep your eyes on the Kingdom, because it's your heavenly Father's good pleasure to give you all his riches of salvation and eternal life, free of charge, and it is his greatest aim and delight to bring you through this life to your heavenly home with him forever.

So keep your eyes on the Kingdom, Jesus says. When you keep your eyes on the Kingdom, you will focus your faith on Jesus Christ and the place in heaven he's preparing for you right now, and that's going to change your outlook on this life, too. It'll straighten your priorities and guide your lives of service, both in the way you handle your possessions and in the way you do the Lord's work.

When you keep your eyes on the Kingdom, Jesus says this to you first of all: *"Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* It's kind of a sad commentary that Jesus even has to say this to us, really. Even though God has always provided us with everything we need for our bodies and lives and has promised to continue to give us that and more, even though God has always shown us that there's no way we can ever out-give him, parting with our own possessions – or rather, the possessions God gives us – is always something we struggle with.

That's especially true for Americans, who have so much more than just about anyone else in the world, and yet we can seem to cling to what we have so much more tightly. But no, like Jesus says here, let's rather use our money and possessions to help the poor and needy, to give to charity, to support the

ministries of the church. Let's make sure our generous and joyful Christian giving here and now reflects our hope for God's eternal Kingdom. After all, Jesus already won for us a spot in heaven for eternity, so now he calls us to prioritize our lives here in a way that anticipates that heavenly goal.

Again, Jesus said, *"Sell your possessions and give to the poor... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* Friends, set your hearts on heaven; keep your eyes on the Kingdom. Through faith in Jesus Christ we are heirs of a greater kingdom than this world could ever hope to offer, so we don't need to be hoarding or showing off what we have here. We instead can use the blessings God gives us to help and be a blessing to others, and so we'll free our hearts from the things of this world so we can be that much more given to God's Kingdom. We don't need to be worried about losing too much here, because we will gain so much more in the long run out of our God's abundant goodness and generosity. Earthly riches come and go – worldly wealth is just decaying decadence that doesn't last – so those shouldn't be our primary care in this life. But the riches of God's grace – his riches of forgiveness, life, and salvation – those riches are yours, those riches are inexhaustible and eternal and no one can ever take them away from us or ruin them for us. Our treasure is in heaven, so may our eyes always be focused there, may our vision always stay clear, and may nothing else ever cloud it or get in the way.

Then along with using your possessions to help others, Jesus says that keeping your eyes on the Kingdom will motivate you to do the Lord's work faithfully and diligently. *"Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night."*

Ever since Jesus ascended back to heaven, he's been away at a banquet of sorts – a banquet celebrating his victory over sin, death, and the devil and his coronation as the king of all creation, who reigns for the good of his Church. When Jesus left, he gave his people a few basic directions: keep my house in order, go and make disciples of all nations, and keep watch, because I'm coming again soon. He hasn't told us when that's going to be, all he said was be always ready, because when I do come, you do not want to be caught unaware.

So then it's very important for us to understand what it means to be ready for Christ's coming. Really, being ready if Christ comes to us is the same thing as being ready for when Christ brings us to him when we die. Either way, when we meet Christ face-to-face, we want to meet him in faith, as our Savior who won for us eternal life and who is bringing us home to himself, and we want him to delight in our service to his Name while he's been gone. But what if you haven't been watching or kept your lamps burning? What if you haven't been faithful in your service? In other words, what if you haven't maintained your faith life through regular worship and Bible study? Well the worst thing we can do is make excuses or try to pass it off like it's no big deal. The devil loves to trick us into thinking we have legitimate reasons for not being here, when really he's just trying his hardest to distance us from Jesus and God's house and the spiritual strength and life that we find here.

So friends, keep your eyes on the Kingdom, because when you do, you'll see that there's nothing more important until you do meet Jesus than strengthening your relationship with him through Word and Sacrament. That's why it's so special when we gather together here for worship, or when a young child is brought to the font, or we join together in the Lord's Supper. When you come here to church and Bible study and when you have personal devotions and Bible reading time at home, Christ himself is making you ready for his coming, and he is assuring you that he will delight in your faith and in the service that flows from it. So keep your faith and your relationship with Jesus Christ primary in your life, and then in the peace and joy of sure salvation, live to his service and glory with whatever opportunities he gives you. Keep one eye on the sky, always hopeful to see him coming to meet you, but in the meantime, use the rest of his gifts to serve his people. Dedicate yourself to the Lord's work until he comes, because then you will truly be prepared for his arrival.

You know, there's one line that Jesus spoke in our text for today that's really worthy of special note in closing: *"I tell you the truth, [the master] will dress himself to serve, will have [his servants] recline at the table and will come and wait on them."* Servants of Christ, know that the day is coming when your hard service will be complete, and then Jesus will bring you to the heavenly banquet that he's setting for you right now. One day our meager service to Christ will be finished, and in turn Christ will serve us perfectly and eternally. We get a foretaste of that every time he feeds us with his Word and invites us to his communion Table. But on that day we will have the fullness of salvation and of all of the blessings God has prepared for us and given to us. So listen to his heavenward call: prioritize your faith, serve your Lord joyfully and diligently, and keep your eyes on the Kingdom, because soon it will all be yours. Amen.