

Luke 12:32-40

Aug 7, 2022

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

So, we've got some fun imagery going on in today's Gospel reading. I don't know if you caught it or not.

Jesus calls his followers a flock. Not a flock of seagulls, but a flock of sheep.

And then he says to store treasure where neither rust nor moth can destroy it. What do moths destroy? Not just crops, but wool. And where does wool come from? Sheep.

Jesus tells the flock of sheep not to allow their wool to be eaten by moths. Don't let the good works of your wool go to waste. Don't let the sweaters or rugs be destroyed by hungry moths.

Have you ever had to deal with moths destroying your stuff?

Growing up in Colorado, I never really ran into that problem. Mice eating papers and other things, yes. But never moths.

The only time I did experience it was when I went to my grandmother's farm in Nebraska. In the back closets, she had those awful smelling moth balls. Do you remember the first time you smelled one of those? Yee! Right? They stink.

I wondered why my grandmother would put up with such a horrible smell. Wouldn't it be better to just use the stuff than to save it and have to put up with the horrible stink?

I know that's perhaps judgy towards my grandmother, but my mom has also always had this attitude of having to save the "good stuff" for later – always later – some things are still in boxes from 30 years ago, including my grandmother's China, and not only her complete set, but an entire other set as well.

My mom ran into a full set at an antique store in Gettysburg and bought that one too, but it never gets used. "You'll want it someday," is what she told me. But in the meantime, it just sits in a box doing nothing.

So why have it? Why let it take up space?

The poor dishes aren't allowed to be what they were created to be. It's like being in a prison – a cardboard prison in a dusty back room.

Wouldn't it be better to let them loose and use them for a grand meal? We have 12 settings. I'm picturing that scene from Beauty and the Beast where the utensils are finally able to do what they have been created to do.

“Be our guest, be our guest, put our service to the test. Tie your napkin round your neck cherie and we'll provide the rest...”

There is great joy in doing what you have been created to do.

And so in this short text from Luke this morning, we have treasure and vocation tied up with one another.

You yourself are a treasure. It's not just what you have, but who you are.

Sheep make wool. That's what they do and that's where/wear the joy is! Pun intended. Wool is used to make sweaters, rugs, and all sorts of other things. When it goes to waste, it's a waste.

And so, our good shepherd – Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, invites us into the world to use our gifts for the sake of the world.

Back in 2015, a literal sheep named Chris was found in the wilderness of Australia. He had disappeared in 2008 and was finally found in 2015. For 7 years he was out in the wilderness while his fleece just kept growing and growing.

Chris was a merino sheep who are bred specifically for their fast growing fleece, which has to be sheared twice a year. You can imagine how miserable Chris was after 7 years without a haircut. That's 14 haircuts he had missed. Can you imagine that?

It took 5 shearers to finally get the wool off of him. When they were finally done the fleece weighed 88 pounds. Can you imagine carrying all that weight? Even if he weighed on the higher side for merino sheep at 200 lbs, that's still a lot of weight to carry and really really hot! The outback in Australia gets easily above 100 degrees F.

He had enough wool on him to make 30 sweaters. Unfortunately, the hair was too long to be of any good for anyone. It was spoiled on the vine. Such a waste and so uncomfortable for him to bear. Clearly poor little Chris didn't have a good shepherd who looked out for him, unlike us.

We do have a good shepherd – the best shepherd –who is always looking out for us.

In the text that came right before this, Jesus reminds us not to worry. The ravens eat and the lilies are clothed, and we are loved so much more than they are. We are to die for, after all. So don't worry about storing up material treasure here. It doesn't make any sense. They are tools to be used, not hoarded.

So, use what you have for the good of others. Sheep make wool. What is it that you have been called into? What gifts do you have? Don't let them spoil on the vine. Use them and have fun. Join the party that is the Kingdom of God!

Keep your eyes and your cupboards open. Don't let the moths eat your special sweater or rust consume your favorite metal object. Instead use them for the good of all and have fun with it.

It drives me crazy when Christians are sad, mopey, and worrying. How is anyone going to believe the good news if we don't act like Jesus Christ, our good shepherd, is risen from the dead?

We, like Abram and Sarai, are called to go out in faith – to trust God – to trust that God is with us and for us, and to live in God's Kingdom, God's city, here and now.

Will it always be smooth sailing, of course not, but God will never abandon us. Unlike poor Chris' shepherd, Jesus will never leave us, and he will help us to shed what needs to be shed and give us opportunity to share our gifts with others, and when we share our gifts with others, we are actually sharing them with him, and that's when the party really gets started and we are transformed from servants into guests.

Sharing our gifts with others is the party, and we are invited to that party every day, because Jesus can show up at any time. So throw out the moth balls, grab your party favors, the gifts you have to share, and join the party.

Jesus is our good shepherd who cares for us and he is also our neighbor who needs what we have to offer. Through the Holy Spirit, those pieces come together, and when they do, it's a celebration. Like when a scoop of ice-cream meets the toppings bar and a 4 year old is in charge of the sprinkles.

There is joy and laughter in the Kingdom of God, and we get to be a part of it here and now. Thanks be to God. Amen.