



Is it accurate for me to say that some days we are afraid? Afraid we will fail? And not just as the Church, but as individual human beings? We often hesitate to step out of our comfort zone. What if I bring up a sensitive topic with a family member? (Will it start WWII?) What if I suggest a new format for a program at work? (Will the boss shut it down because he didn't come up with it first, and will my co-workers be convinced I've only created more work?) What if I witness an act of injustice and rise up against it? (Will I regret I got involved? Will it come back to bite me?)

But it is also true that, in the midst of our fear of failure, if there is someone who encourages us, who has our back, who offers their ongoing support and cheers us on...well, we might just step out into that uncertain possibility and take that risk of something new. I know that if a former senior pastor here at Trinity had not encouraged me, I would never have entered Dauphin County Prison to lead worship. I know that Debbie Wilson has mentored and supported vocalists and musicians in FaithX over the years, helping them grow to their potential. I've witnessed folks stand up for an important issue in our congregation, communicating their concerns in honest, respectful, but firm ways. I've seen our VBS volunteers nurture our youngest children, encouraging them if they are a little afraid or homesick while in Vacation Bible School. I've watched countless people over the years here at Trinity grow in faith and passionately serve in the world in ways they couldn't have imagined because someone else here offered support and prayed for them.

I believe all that encouragement finds its roots in the words of our Lord Jesus, who tells his disciples, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." You know, it would be interesting to count up the number of times God tells his people not to be afraid, whether it is through the mouths of prophets or angels, or the mouth of God's own self. Let's just say it happens throughout the Bible. Luke's Gospel is famous for it. From the angel Gabriel who appears to Mary and informs her she is to give birth to God's Son, to the angel on the hillside overlooking Bethlehem who calms the fears of the shepherds and announces the Good News of Jesus, to the crucified and Risen Jesus himself who offers peace to his terrified disciples—well, Luke records again and again God's reassuring words that we are not to be afraid.

As our Gospel reading begins, Jesus has just reminded his disciples that they don't have to worry about what they'll eat or what they'll drink or how in the world they'll get by. He suggests they simply look at the flowers in the field and birds in the air, and note how God cares for them. How much more will God care for his children? Then we come to the first verse of our reading: "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

Now, perhaps we hear the word "kingdom" and immediately leap to thoughts of heaven and eternal life. Ok, sure, we get that God has made promises of life beyond our death. But I think Jesus is also, and maybe more so, talking about this world and God's activity in it. God's kingdom—where the good and just and righteous things God wants to have happen in this world are beginning to show themselves. Jesus says it pleases God to bring about this kingdom now for you and me, and it is this kingdom where God wants us to play such an important part. Only we must not be afraid, and we must not worry that we might fail. Because Jesus promises God will not fail us. Remember, it pleases God to give us all this: his kingdom.

It seems to me that when we are told we do not have to be afraid, and that God will always be with us to encourage and strengthen us, then maybe we actually can begin to live into this relationship of trust to which God calls us. And we will suddenly find ourselves free to imagine the possibilities. Free to try new things, to dare to dream and act upon the dream. Free to give ourselves and our possessions away. Free to care generously about others. Free to put our energy into something, not because we know for a fact it will succeed, but because we know for a fact it is the right and faithful thing to do in our Father's kingdom.

Maybe one of the most important things this Church can do is be the place where we encourage one another with God's loving promises, and reassure one another of our place in God's kingdom. Then you and I can leave Trinity each Sunday just a little stronger, just a little braver, and walk out into our world to bring the kingdom of God to others.

I end the sermon as I began, with the words of David Lose:  
**What would you love to try if you knew you couldn't fail? AMEN.**

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