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Elizabeth Menstell

KINGDOM VALUES NOW

Good morning! For those of you who don't know me, my name is Elizabeth Menstell and I first became a member here at Peace when I was a preteen. I'm Barbara Hillier's granddaughter and Katharine's sister, and when I graduated high school in 2011, I moved to the East Coast for college. After 8 years back east in Washington DC and Atlanta, I recently moved home to Seattle, this time bringing along my partner, Tyler.

Our transition from graduate school students in Atlanta to Seattle has been interesting. Has anyone here lived in Atlanta? In some ways it's seemingly the opposite of Seattle. First off, Atlanta barely recycles – we had to throw away glass and felt very guilty for indulging in a bottle of wine. In Seattle many people hold a grudge against Amazon, whereas in Atlanta people love the large local business, Coca-Cola and celebrate it by going to the Museum of Coke to taste-test Coke products from far corners of the world. And then, instead of receiving a drinking water quality report in the mail like we did here in Seattle a month or so ago, every other month in Atlanta we would get a text from public utilities saying there was another emergency boil-water advisory due to a sewage contamination in the drinking water.

So, for the most part, my transition to Seattle was very welcomed – in Seattle I get to be close to my family and childhood friends, and be in a place that cares and invests in human and environmental services. But of course the move was also challenging. Tyler and I had to consider the expense of moving over 2500 miles. We had to pack up our home and say goodbye to graduate school friends – friends who got us through 2 of the most mentally demanding years of our lives. We also left our church community who was really a blessing and another family for us.

Because I was going through a big life transition, it seemed to be a good time to make some changes in my habits to become happier, sort of like mid-year resolutions. I turned to different self-help authors and podcast hosts who had tips on how to make the most of your entry-level career, and how to meal-prep i.e. planning and cooking big batches of food to ensure you always have something healthy in the fridge, and how to stay on an exercise routine.

Instead of these self-help authors, it looks like I could have turned toward today's gospel of Luke to gain some pointers from Jesus. In this passage, Jesus lays out 3 main steps to discipleship and leading a righteous life. And it turns out, these 3 steps were well positioned to help me consider my transition to my hometown.

First in today's gospel Jesus says: Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.

The act of not being afraid or having anxiety can be challenging. It's safe to say that my move to Seattle came with a lot of anxiety. I was worried about the cost of moving across the country, of what my new role at work would be, if I would get along with my colleagues, if I could reconnect with childhood friends and make new ones. It's funny, you'd think I'd be more anxious about grad school finals and submitting my thesis on time than moving back to my hometown, but I found my jaw sore from overnight teeth grinding more post-graduation than pre.

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So when I look at the scripture for pathways to discipleship, Jesus makes it easy for you and me – first up, just stop, stop being afraid, stop worrying and don't be fearful for the trials and tribulations on Earth or for what's to come next.

This isn't the first time we hear a heavenly figure tell an earthly one to stop being afraid. And often, this recommendation comes before an announcement of good news. God says this to Sarah and Abraham before they become the parents of a nation, and Mary is told this when she discovers she is pregnant with Jesus. Jesus tells it to us now, and the announcement of good news for us is that it is God's good pleasure to give us the Kingdom of Heaven.

So how can we work to quiet our fears and remember that our lives are all a part of God's plan? Well, next Jesus instructs us to remove the earthly treasures from our lives and instead store up heavenly treasures.

Jesus says where our treasure lies, our heart will be also. And who really wants their heart to lie in that extra crockpot or the new TV? Instead Jesus says we should release ourselves from our preoccupations for these possessions, one way we could do that is to sell them and give the profits to those less fortunate. Without concerns over our stuff we can focus more energy on true sources of life and vitality. We should put Godly and moral things first, remove our personal gains, and focus on the things Jesus would like to see us doing.

This again was a helpful reminder as Tyler and I chose to part with many household items as we prepared to move across the country and downsize to a 550 square foot apartment. Many other people have been thinking about finally going through the junk drawer, especially after Marie Kondo's Netflix show made clearing clutter became trendy.

But Jesus doesn't want us to donate our items only for our own personal mental clarity, but also to make room in our lives to build heavenly treasures. So it seems to me like it would be a good idea to invest in our relationships with our families, each other here at this church, invest in other people.

The dearly beloved and celebrated author Toni Morrison would tell her students "*When you get these jobs that you have been so brilliantly trained for, just remember that your real job is that if you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else*." Let's work to push ourselves to build these types of treasures in our lives, because it seems like an honorable place to keep our hearts.

Next up, Jesus tells us to be prepared for the Kingdom of God on Earth and gives us an example of how to be prepared with a parable about masters and slaves. Slaves should be prepared to do their masters bidding, even in the middle of the night, and if they are ready, the master will take on the slaves' role and start to serve them. This role reversal is seen throughout Jesus' gospel. Jesus has no patience for our societal assessments of who counts and who doesn't count. Instead, he himself works to undo these bindings.

So how should we work to be ready for the Son of Man to arrive here on Earth? I considered this and have 2 ideas, the first is to act like Jesus and work to level the social status playing field where, often certain types of people wind up on top and others on bottom.

Now that we're here in Seattle, Tyler and I are ready to do this in our own way, with my work in Public Health, working to make sure people don't get sick or hurt by giving them access to health prevention

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services, and Tyler's work to make more equitable cities through Urban Planning. I know you all also work to help others in your own way, following your own passions.

How else can we work to be ready for the Kingdom? Another way might just be to take a moment to see, feel, touch, and hear God's presence around us here and now. Who says we have to wait, why not enjoy it when we feel God's presence in our lives today. By remaining alert, we open ourselves to divine presence in its fullness, when I'm living in the present, thinking about God, I see their presence in my life and communities more. This might be while watching the sun set behind the mountains, seeing something good happen between two people, or hearing a favorite hymn. Part of being ready for Jesus' coming is seeing how he and God are present here already today.

So there we have it, Jesus' gospel on discipleship. Don't be afraid, store up heavenly treasure, and be ready for the Kingdom on Earth. We may hope that completing these tasks on our Godly to-do list will satisfy Jesus and lead us to a happier life, or in my case, a happier start to my new chapter in here Seattle.

While we should remember to keep these tenets at the forefront of our minds, let's also not forget Lutheran 101, it's all about grace through faith, and faith is a relationship that grabs hold of us and comes from God.

This week I'm going to invite you all (and myself) to strengthen our faith through remembering we are all promised God's Kingdom. So let's banish our worries in order to more easily build our heavenly treasure and prepare for the glories of the Kingdom by sharing our gifts with others and recognizing that the Kingdom is already here on Earth, and we see it when we pause to look.

Practicing these tasks and keeping our faith will mean that those with less than us can have more. It means standing up to injustice when we see it. It means praying and working for the peace and health of our communities.

It's God's good pleasure to give us the Kingdom of heaven.
Amen.