

Luke 12:32. "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom."

Have no fear little flock.

1. The Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom

2. The Lord Jesus is our Shepherd.

There is always a certain level of uncertainty when heading into a new year. New Year's Eve is customarily a night of celebration as we pause and we look back and count our blessings. New Year's Eve we stop and time seems to stand still as there is a certain joy and appreciation for getting through another year. There is this sense of hope as we think about the possibilities; we think of what could be in the New Year. New Year's Day, still has this sense of a hope and possibility and a fresh start, but now that sense of time standing still is gone and we are now thrust into a new year filled with unexpected challenges, carefully planned opportunities, foreseen struggles, and unforeseen blessings. Who knows what will happen in this New Year?

There is always a certain level of uncertainty as we head into the New Year and that can be unsettling. Take for example the uncertainty that already hovers over one of 2014's biggest events. The winter Olympics are to be held in Sochi, Russia. A cloud of uncertainty has descended upon this event after nearly 35 people were killed in two separate terrorist attacks in a nearby Russian city. People who a few weeks ago were preparing to celebrate the New Year and welcome visitors from all over the world were sent into shock and horror. Hope and the possibilities of a fresh start have been muddied by the reality of life in world that is so unpredictable and so continually in turmoil.

The other big news that has surrounded these winter games and this huge event of this New Year is the stance that has been taken by both the Russian and the U.S. presidents on the issue of homosexuality. The Russian president Vladimir Putin helped pass a law that prohibits in Russia the distribution of information to minors that promotes same-sex relationships. The law sparked global outrage and a wave of protests demanding a boycott of the Games. The president of the United States did not support the idea of a boycott, but instead made a different kind of statement as he purposefully selected openly gay delegates to represent the United States of America at these Olympics.

These issues that hang over the winter games are a bit of a microcosm of the issues that hang over our society as we are now thrust into this new year of 2014. And so whether it is terrorist attacks or the continued attack on traditional and biblical values, one has to wonder what is going to happen in 2014.

There is always uncertainty when we travel into the unknown. What will life in 2014 be like for believers in this world of sin? What will life be like for me and for my children? What changes will this year bring? What major events, what landmark decisions will affect my life? Will 2014 be a turbulent year or will it be one of good fortune and peace? What kind of things

will happen to me in my personal life? Will illness or setbacks mark my year or will this be a year of stability and health?

The fact of the matter is, we don't know. We can make assumptions based on the past year. We can make estimations based on the direction we see this world moving, but in the end it is up to God. No matter how much we worry, how much we fret, it is not going to change anything or add a single day to our lives. And so this morning we start our year like we start each day. We place all things into God's direction.

Luke chapter 12:22-34 is one of the 'do not worry' sections of the Bible as it recounts Jesus profoundly assuring words that we need not worry, because he is with us. Here he reminds us that we are his flock and he is our shepherd who will supply our need.

Even though we feel like we are a little flock - that so few share our beliefs and ideals - even though it seems like so many are rising up against us and pushing against our beliefs like an unrelenting tide that wants to sweep us away, the Lord tells us to take heart. He assures us that we can live life in joy, in confidence in generosity, and security. He tells us that we are in his care and therefore we are free to live life in the peace that he brings to us. The Lord is with us. He is our shepherd who will lead us and guide us, protect us and care for us.

The Lord Jesus is with us in this new year as he has been with us in the previous. And so like a child cautiously dipping a toe in the ocean suddenly her uncertainty and her fears are soothed by the strong hand and reassuring presence of her father leading her into the water, so too the Lord takes by the hand and gives us the courage to take on the challenges ahead by assuring us of his presence.

The Lord reminds us in the book of Isaiah of this truth. ***When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.*** Throughout scripture, on multiple occasions and in various ways he uses the picture of the shepherd to assure us of his love and care. ***I will guide my flock like a shepherd. I will be with them.*** The Lord says to us. And of course, he reassures us that he isn't just any old shepherd, but he is the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep. The eternal God of heaven and earth cares for us. He was born into this world to save us. He bore our sins through life and made sure that they were all paid for by his death on the cross. He rules over all things for the good of those who love him.

He has done all this and in these words from Luke chapter 12 he assures us that he has been pleased to give us the kingdom. There is no uncertainty here. God in his love has sent his Son to save. He has won the victory that gives us true peace of soul and mind. He gives us lasting hope and enduring stability. For in love he has brought us into his family, his kingdom, his flock. In his love he has called us to faith and daily pours out on us his blessings. This may not always be in the form of success and wealth and earthly happiness. But in his goodness and grace he daily provides us with strength and peace and forgiveness. Along with these lasting blessings he provides us with his steadfast love and eternal joy.

In his love God our Father, has been gracious in sending us his Son, his Spirit, and his Word. He has been pleased to bless us with the kingdom and he tells us to serve him with confidence. He tells us to pray that his kingdom would come that his will would be done. He will deliver us from evil. He will protect and guide us through the new year. And even when evil and trouble and struggles befall us he will uphold his children by his righteous right hand.

When we are knocked over by the waves of trouble and sadness that 2014 may bring, the Lord, God our Father, Jesus our Good Shepherd, will be there to pick us up and comfort us.

These are God's precious promises to us. This is our source of stability and security. But too often we seek our stability and our peace of mind from different sources, first. Too often we base our whole outlook for stability and peace on our wallets and bank accounts. Too often we look to material possessions and the pleasures of life to provide hope and peace and security. In our sinfulness too often we look to ourselves, to our limited strength and to our flawed capabilities; we look to this world which is so full of turmoil and we try to find stability and security. How can we expect such toils in these realms of uncertainty and instability to ever bring us peace?!

No, our peace and our joy, our stability and security, comes from the Lord. We are his children. He promises to care for us. He promises to tend to us like a shepherd. He promises that our Father has already been pleased to give us the kingdom. We are his. He forgives us for our weakness, for our skewed priorities, for our lack of trust, for our chronic dependence on the things of this world. And then reminds us of his steadfast and eternal love. No problem in this world is too big. No threat to our life or our faith is beyond his control. We are in his hands. He has given us his kingdom. He has brought us to faith. And he will guide us to the eternal day when we will reign with him for all eternity. Do not worry. Do not be afraid. The Lord is our shepherd. We are precious members of his little flock.

This gives us courage and confidence as we face the challenges of 2014 as individual believers and as a family of believers. As a congregation one of the biggest events of this new year is the opening our Little Lambs Learning Center this September. In any such endeavor there will be some a certain level of uncertainty. But the Lord goes with us. He will be with us in our coming and going. He will bless our plans and this program as he sees fit. He will be with us through the blessings and the challenges. Therefore, we don't have to fear, for he is with his little flock. He is with us as and assures us that he has given us the kingdom. He is with us and gives us courage as we seek to extend his kingdom, as we seek to share the good news of Jesus Christ, born, crucified, and risen for us. He is with us as we seek to share the peace that this message brings to the families of our community.

Sure the devil will attack. Doubts and problems and unforeseen obstacles are all things that we can expect as our foe will try his best to stifle our efforts. He will try to cause divisions so that he may divide and disrupt, separate and attack. But our Good Shepherd reassures us, "Have no fear little flock". We have been given the kingdom. We are safe in his care. The Lord is in our hearts and that bond of faith is strengthened when we gather together around his precious means of grace. Have no fear for the Lord has given you the kingdom. Have no fear for the Lord will be with us as we seek to advance his kingdom and bring the good news to others.

There is a level of uncertainty as we face the new year, but the Lord takes us by the hand and reassures us of his loving presence. So dear friends, go forth into 2014 with that blessed assurance. Be comforted and encouraged by his presence. Live under his care and in his love. Have no fear little flock. For the Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom and the Lord Jesus is our Shepherd. Amen.