**The Holy Gospel according to Luke 12: 32-40
32**“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.  **33**Sell your possessions and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near, and no moth destroys.  **34**For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

**35**“Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit;  **36**be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks.  **37**Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them.  **38**If he comes during the middle of the night or near dawn and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.

**39**“But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into.  **40**You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

This is the Gospel of Christ

In the gospel reading last week, Luke was alluding to the sometimes devastating effects of wealth. In modern times, this can include Lotto winners and sports people. He issued warnings of greed and presumption of status. The gospel clearly has a bias to the poor, but there are also those anxious that their retirement income will not guarantee their security and sadly, their well-planned pension plans can develop holes through which their status and security may disappear.

Throughout history there have been many corrupters of earthly treasure. Modern technology has made stealing easier and a great concern, but other threats to wealth are stock market fluctuations, currency fluctuations, the current world-wide inflation, runaway taxes, failed investments, the stroke of a bureaucrat’s pen, litigation, natural disasters, and obsolescence. And of course, there is global warming, fouled air, and the prospect of being buried in one’s own garbage. Since 9/11, we have begun to recognize the danger of chemical, biological, or nuclear terrorism. Compared with such truly disastrous possibilities, thieves and moths are but a minor irritant.

Central to the message of St Luke’s gospel is a very simple word: don’t be afraid. Most of us do have concerns at times, just like the shepherds in the Christmas story. So, like them we need to hear the word of God’s messenger –don’t be afraid. Fear may be a perfectly natural response when one thinks of all the bad things that keep happening in this world, but the God in whom we believe, is a God of love and his love casts out fear. So, fear not.

Following the parable of the rich fool in Luke 12, Jesus tells the disciples not to become preoccupied with even the basic necessities of life, like food and clothing. Their prime concern should be the assurance that God will care for them, and not ignore their need for life’s essentials.

We can only imagine what our treasure might be. Given the choice of treasure first, one is more likely to put our hope in achievements, acquisitions, and assets. Yet, when the lack of fear precedes our fear-driven desires for possessions, purchases, and procurements we might actually be able to imagine treasures beyond self-driven determination, self-assessed success, and security without being driven by anxiety about status. I must have more than him or her so that my worth is recognised. I must have a better house, a newer phone, or a more exotic holiday to show my friends that I am a worthy person who is getting on in life. One can be full of fear about falling behind and ceasing to be regarded as worthy of respect resulting in discontent, inequality, and unhappiness.

Well, that’s all very easy to say, but I don’t think it concerns clothing conventions. For example, if I went to a BBQ dressed in black tie, I might just look out of place. Alternatively, if I went to a reception at Government house in shorts, t-shirt, and jandals it would certainly be noticed, if I got in the door. At St Aidan’s in Remuera, I went to church wearing a jacket and tie to try and fit in, something I now reserve for funerals and ANZAC Day. That is not dressing for status, we just try to conform. But dressing standards apart, Christians should not be bothered about status because we are followers of Jesus who deliberately came down to the lowest level in human society to practice perfect love. The gospel invites us to embrace God’s way trusting that we can enter a family of brothers and sisters in Christ who know who they are and what they are about with love, kindness, and basic social solidarity.

Luke, both in this Gospel and in the book of Acts, emphasizes the virtue of charity. But often the world instead says, “Grab all the gusto you can get”—and “Look out for Number One”—and “The person who dies with the most toys wins.” But Jesus stood the world’s wisdom on its head when he said, “Sell that which you have, and give gifts to the needy.” I’m sure he has in mind something beyond thrift-shop charity—he may have meant something beyond giving only that which we no longer need. Sadly, much of the world believes the opposite leading to wild excesses seeking fulfillment through expensive possessions or adventures. Jesus offered an alternative, telling us to be happy and grateful givers, and assuring us that our hearts will follow our gifts. That is a principle that Christians have proven time and time again. People who help other people find themselves caring about the people whom they help—and enjoying the meaningful life that results from meeting real needs.

Finally, Luke says we must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour we do not expect. When? Dunno, but we do understand readiness. It is often a matter of life and death in many circumstances. For example, Firefighters, emergency medical technicians, soldiers, and physicians need to be ready, the right tools at hand, when the time for action arises. Every minute counts in a crisis. The firefighter who is delayed five minutes might find that the fire has spread out of control. The physician who is delayed five minutes might find that the patient has died. People in crisis-oriented professions train regularly so that they can respond effectively when the crisis comes. By being prepared for Christ’s coming the overarching theme of the gospel passage is one of readiness. Our God is a loving and generous God, and he longs for us to embrace the way of generosity too. This is the kind of readiness that Jesus had in mind, a readiness based on generosity and an accumulation of treasure in heaven where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.

Amen.