

Have Faith Little Flock
August 10, 2025
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“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

There was a song my home congregation used to sing when I was a kid that had this text:

*Have no fear little flock
have no fear little flock
for the Father has chosen
to give you the kingdom
have no fear little flock.*

It’s a simple, happy ditty that can get stuck in your head very easily (like while you’re trying to write your sermon, for example)

It’s so cheery! In fact the second verse is

*Have good cheer little flock
have good cheer little flock
for the Father will keep you
in his love forever
have good cheer little flock*

You can’t help but sing the song and feel joyful

And yet, I’m a little afraid the chipperness of the song masks the seriousness of Christ’s message to his disciples in this morning’s reading – I’m not sure it captures the weight of what he’s trying to tell us

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

In Luke's gospel, the kingdom of God isn't some end-time promise of heavenly rest in a palace

the kingdom of God is God's breaking into our world and showing us an alternative way of being *now* – God's way on earth now is possible because we have glimpsed it in the life and ministry of Jesus

Have no fear little flock...your Father's way is breaking into the world, breaking into your world

Your father's way is accessible to you now - peace reigns, justice prevails, love governs

The song from my childhood feels a bit like a fairytale promising a happy ending – as if singing the song and turning the next page will reveal that all is well and it's here

Those of us who have been around a while, we're still waiting for that page to turn, we're still waiting to glimpse God's kingdom on earth because let me tell you: peace does not reign, justice does not prevail, and love does not govern

No wonder generations of believers before us have turned God's kingdom into an end-times idea – it sure as heck isn't happening now so God's kingdom must be another realm kind of thing, God's kingdom must mean heaven, and heaven is what we experience when we die

Have no fear, little flock, when you die you'll finally be okay

I can't actually imagine Jesus saying such a thing, can you?

Have no fear, little flock, peace, justice, and love are possible now – that's a Jesus message!

Maybe instead of “have no fear,” we could say “have faith!”

Have faith, little flock, that God has delivered the kingdom to you!

Well, if we’re going to change the word to “faith” then we definitely need a little dose of the Hebrews reading from this morning

It’s one of my favorite go-to’s in trying to describe what faith is like to people: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

Isn’t that great?

It’s been a favorite, and it is becoming even more of a favorite as I read commentaries about it

Madison Pierce, a New Testament professor at Western Theological Seminary in MI notes: This translation understands the Greek words hypostasis (“assurance”) and elenchos (“conviction”) to describe subjective realities. This interpretation could be paraphrased: ‘Faith is the assurance [for me] of things hoped for, [providing] a conviction [for me] of things not seen.’”¹

Yeah, OK, that’s what I take from that line, what are we *supposed* to hear?

“Most [scholars] understand those Greek terms to describe objective realities” she continues. “[her] translation is: ‘Now faith is the foundation for things being hoped for, proof for things we do not see.’ Faith is the reason they hope for things, trusting that God will fulfill his promises, and faith provides proof (in a manner of speaking) that unseen things exist.”

¹ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-19-3/commentary-on-hebrews-111-3-8-16-6>

Another scholar offers his translation: “Faith rests in or taps into the really real of hoped-for things; it leads to conviction and action in the visible world, even though it is rooted in things that cannot be seen.”²

I thought the original translation was pretty good – its subjectiveness gave me wiggle room in what it meant to be a faithful person

These objective translations knock my socks off – faith isn’t wobbly, it’s a foundation you could build a life upon

And that’s precisely what the author of Hebrews highlights next in their text by reminding us of the lives and faithfulness of our faithful ancestors, Abraham and Sarah

Abraham and Sarah are our faith great great great great great grandfather and grandmother in Genesis who were instructed by God to leave their homeland and go to a new land, a promised place

And so Abraham and Sarah...go!

“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going”

By calling these people our faithful ancestors – so much so that we call ourselves one of the three *Abrahamic* traditions, the others being our Jewish siblings and our Muslim siblings – you’d think that Abraham and Sarah’s story would be full of good fortune and a fairytale happy ending

I’m afraid not

Although Abraham and Sarah spend time in the land promised to them by God and although they have a son, they never truly live a settled life in that

² <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-19-3/commentary-on-hebrews-111-3-8-16-5>

land and they never get to know their descendents - the ones God promised as many as stars in the sky and sand in the desert

And yet this didn't stop them from living lives of faith, this didn't stop them from utterly changing their lives and living different lives than what they had planned because of their faith

Faith...the foundation for things being hoped for, proof for things we do not see

Faith...tapping into the really real of hoped-for things; leading to conviction and action in the visible world, even though rooted in things that cannot be seen.

Faith...the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Faith...strong enough to build a life upon, a worthy enough reason to live in and respond to the world differently than we did before

Have faith, little flock, the kingdom draws near

Does peace prevail, justice reign, and love govern? - no!

Is that a reason to live as if they won't?

Or perhaps, Jesus is saying and the author of Hebrews is reminding us that, with faith, we can live as if they do.

Faith is living as if they do.

You've maybe heard the expression: plant the seeds of a tree whose shade you'll never sit in

Jesus calls us to live live a kingdom-life and to plant the seeds of peace, justice, and love even if you never anticipate resting in their shade

*Have no fear little flock
have no fear little flock
for the Father has chosen
to give you the kingdom
have no fear little flock.*

Have faith little flock...

Because faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Thanks be to God. Amen.