

AUGUST 7, 2022 – GET READY

Our gospel this week is from Luke 12: 35-40

We continue our journey through the gospel of Luke,. Of course, we're in cycle C, so we've been reading from the gospel of Luke all year.

The gospel of Luke, often referred to as the gospel of mercy.

We are in the 12th chapter.

Jesus said to his disciples, "Do not be afraid any longer, little flock. Your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom."

Wow, where to even begin?

Well, let's start with the fact that I can assure you that nobody had ever heard anything like this before.

I think it's very easy for us to lose how radically different Jesus was and continues to be.

This was a radical departure as to how they viewed Yahweh.

And we talked about this last week, but Yahweh was a distant God, separated behind the curtain [like the wizard in Oz] in the temple, in the Holy of Holies, separated and distant because of sin.

In fact, the name Yahweh was so holy among the Jewish people, you couldn't even say it.

Yahweh was certainly not relational.

Yahweh was to be appeased by sacrifice, along with our vain attempts to be righteous, period.

And there were over 600 laws to show you how you got that done.

Follow the law, you're good.

Follow your own law.

And of course, they had many, many laws, like I said, over 600, including how to wash a cup or a dish.

And if you faithfully followed the law, you are righteous.

And if you're righteous, then you are blessed, that's the way it went then.

It's the ultimate **merit-based theology**. And you know that whole argument. Are we saved by grace or works? Well, it's definitely the works for them.

And the blessings were self-evident.

If you're wealthy, if you have plenty of food, if you're free from any disease, well then, you're obviously righteous, because you're doing all the things right, and God is blessing you accordingly.

On the other hand, if you're struggling, if you're poor, if you have disease, or lack of food, well then you know, you must have done something, because you're being cursed by God.

This was the religion of the day.

It was a religion that had a lot of secrets.

The righteous kept their secrets, and those who struggled kept their secrets.

And as the crowds made their way into the temple for the Sabbath, the Pharisees, who were the

paragon of righteousness, stood guard, actually standing at the gate, watching the crowd.

And if they saw somebody that they deemed unworthy, somebody they thought was not righteous, or unclean in any way, they would be invited to leave.

Can you even imagine the humiliation of public excommunication, reinforcing the notion that God is far away?

And then here comes Jesus, and he does not look at all like any of the other Pharisees, or the scribes, or the Sadducees.

And he certainly doesn't talk like that, "Do not be afraid any longer, my little flock. Your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom."

Now, when we hear these words some 2,000 years later, we are hearing them through the **lens of religion**.

And many of us have bought into the notion of a loving God in heaven, that stands ready to bless us. I mean, I know I do, I can't be this lucky.

But let's try to hear these words through their ears, because remember for them, Yahweh was a distant God, that name so holy you couldn't even say it.

In fact, the name was so holy that when a scribe wrote it, he had to break his pen, do a ritual cleansing, and change his clothes.

Now you got Jesus showing up, and he's calling Yahweh **Father**, even worse, Abba, or **Abba**, which means daddy, it's stunning.

And he is telling us that Yahweh, for no other reason than that it simply pleases him to do so, is giving us the **kingdom**.

We cannot earn it; it is a **gift**.

So, get over your anxiety, get over your guilt, get over your shame, your unworthiness, your wretchedness, and most importantly, get over your fear, and understand that even though you do not deserve it in any way, God is giving it to you, simply because it pleases him to do so.

Now think about those people hearing this message for the first time, with a fear-based religion as a background?

And in fact, you know, there might be somebody that's watching today that is hearing this message for the first time, and you're thinking, "Ah, that sounds good. I would really like to believe that, wouldn't that be great?"

Of course, we're all used to hearing flowery words. We're used to hearing promises.

You know, we got the elections coming up, I imagine we'll be hearing all kinds of promises.

Many of them will start with the word free.

But I think we all know there is no such thing as free, but that is what Jesus is saying today, "Your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom."

And it's not just what he's saying that's unbelievable, he's doing unbelievable things. As I said, we're in chapter 12, and the 12th chapter of the gospel of Luke begins with Jesus addressing the issue of secrets.

We all got them, but Jesus makes it very clear that there are no secrets in heaven.

There is nothing but **justice**.

And just because you seem blessed in this world is in no way an indication that you're righteous in the eyes of God.

This turns merit-based theology on its head.

Remember our rich fool last week?

So clearly, riches are not the bellwether of blessing. Jesus goes on to teach us that we can depend on God. God takes care of the sparrows, and he's going to take care of you.

In other words, God's got this.

But as human beings, we toil, we labor, we collect all the things that we think we need, all the things that we think are going to make us happy, all the while we're filled with this anxiety, that somehow our needs are not going to be met.

We fear the future.

We worry.

Let me tell you my friend, if you want to make a top 10 list of unproductive activities, worry is on the top of that list, but this is what we do.

And as far as our personal relationship with God, we often look very much like the people in our gospel today, people who saw God as somehow far away, people who felt separated from God, that is us.

And while we might not feel separated because of Mosaic law, but we do feel separated because of moral law, or natural law.

Either way, the end result is the same.

God is far away, and we are separated by our sin.

Maybe we go to church, maybe we don't.

But by day, we got secrets we need to pray about, admit to and confess.

Well, let me try to explain it by explaining what it is not, okay?

Because in doing so, you are putting everything on the table, as you recognize, I'm a fallen human being, there is nothing unique about me, and I am accepting what God is freely offering me.

Not that I deserve it, not because I'm really, really sorry for my sins, but because I'm standing on the promise of what Christ has done for me, and my friend, that goes way beyond forgiveness.

Welcome back to Daily Living. "Gird your loins, and light your lamps, and be as servants who await their masters' return from a wedding, ready to open up immediately when he comes and knocks."

So, Jesus is making it very clear that we need to be ready.

And what would that look like?

Well, let's start by what it doesn't look like.

If you're truly ready, you are not practicing your habitual sin like the 24/7 news does.

That is a big part of living your life ready.

You know, about five years ago, August 17th, 2017, to be exact, the United States experienced a solar eclipse, and the path of totality moved through the Southern states.

So many packed put blankets out on a field, and put on special glasses, and they all stared at the sky.

They were ready.

And as the moon started to cross over the sun, the whole sky went dark, except on the horizon.

We could see a little bit of light, but everything got really quiet.

They had anticipated the moment.

They were prepared for the moment.

"Gird your loins and light your lamps and be like servants who await their master's return."

This is how we are called to live our lives, with the same anticipation, seeking that moment, like the many seeking the eclipse.

That kind of focus.

But we don't have to go lie in some field with special glasses on to prepare for that day.

What we do have to do is act as if our relationship with Christ is the most important thing in our lives.

What do we spend our time thinking about?

"For where your treasure is, there also your heart will be."

Now I imagine the day after Jesus first ascended, there was great anticipation.

Following Jesus was the most important thing for everybody.

But as the years became decades, and then the decades became centuries, we have lost that sense of anticipation.

Our treasure has shifted, and where the treasure shifted, the heart has drifted.

And the idea of dependence on God, well, you know, that's kind of drifted too, hadn't it?

We live in a world where it's all about the treasure. There's a whole lot of talk about who's got too much, who's got too little, and the idea of dependence on God, well, that's kind of going, well, that's the religious folk.

You know, it's kind of going out of favor, you know, the folks with good morals?

Now, today we read the short version of this gospel, but the longer one starts with, "Sell your belongings and give alms, and provide money bags for yourselves that do not wear out, an inexhaustible treasure in heaven that no thief can reach, nor moth destroy, for where your treasure is, there also will your heart be."

So, what does that really mean?  
Are we supposed to sell everything we have, and live in the street in poverty?  
Is Jesus suggesting that having money in the bank, or a college fund, or retirement savings are somehow faithless acts?  
I don't think so.  
I think what he's really trying to say is this, if you take out one of those legal pads, you know, those yellow legal pads, you decide to write down the most important things to you in your life, like in order, and be honest, from the most important thing and down, somewhere on that list is Jesus.  
And whatever it is that comes before Jesus, you have to lose before you can even know him.  
Search your heart, my friend.  
Try to figure out what the most important thing is in your life, and if it isn't the kingdom, which the Father is pleased to give you, then you need to get rid of it.  
You know, talking about my brother, he loved to purchase 'stuff' to give to people at random. It was his thing, One year it was watches, another games, another it was cards.

But then the day came, why?  
Because it always comes, why? Because news flash, we don't see you. Then, in a flash, life as he knew it changed.  
And on the day, he almost met his maker, the treasure he had buried in a field, his pearl of great price was the ability to shop.  
It wasn't good. It was just a 'time bandit' even though for things for other people.  
He never told me what it was, but whatever it was, it was something that he did not want to show up at the throne room of judgment with.  
He was going to cross over with a head full of secrets, and a heart full of missed opportunities.  
"For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be."  
My friends, there are no secrets in heaven, and we're all going to cross over with a heart full of something.  
It's the nature of man to get, and when we get, to get more, why?  
Because it provides us like some kind of security.  
We store up treasure.  
So, when we die, we just hope that the good luck charm in the sky will intercede and get us into heaven.  
But our gospel today very much begs to differ on this point.  
What Jesus is saying is completely different, because he starts with a question, and the question is, "Where is your heart today?"

In other words, where is your treasure?

"If you have a heart for me, then live like it. Live your life, watching the door, waiting for my arrival, as you would wait on an eclipse."  
Jesus says, "I am the door, keep your eye on me."  
In the 1800s, there was a British explorer, by the name of David Livingston.  
And he traveled extensively into the heart of Africa, deep into the jungles, the first white man to do so.  
It was during the height of the slave trade in this country.  
And through the years, he would venture deep into the jungle and warn the people about this terrible practice.  
In doing so, he developed a very strong bond with the people.  
In 1872, he died of dysentery, he was 59 years old.  
It said that he passed away while he was kneeling in prayer.  
His body was to be taken back to England and buried at Westminster Abbey.  
However, the local Africans were reluctant to give up his body.  
They finally did, but first they cut out his heart to bury it locally.  
They said, "You can have his body, but his heart belongs to Africa."

What about you, my friend?  
if your heart was to be buried in the place you love most in this life, where would it be?  
With your stuff?  
At your desk in some office?  
In a bank account?  
At the local pub?  
Where is your heart?  
For where your treasure is, that's where your heart will be.  
The Master is returning. But, by then, I hope you realized that He has been with us all the time.  
Let us keep our eyes on the door.  
And the people said: Amen

*We will have worship this Sunday out in God's back yard. Some who were with us in 2020 out back are no longer on this side of paradise; other's are in Nursing Homes and some others are no longer able to drive. But we will be under the dome of sky, sitting in our lawn chairs on God's green again earth since the last couple of days of rain. Rain, a gift! Bring your beverage and a lawn chair. See you church in God's Backyard! Rev. KatieD+*