

Call to Worship - “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”
(Luke 12: 32 NRSV)

Hymn - STF – 531 What a friend we have in Jesus,
Watch on You tube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8SCorW9r_Is

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 What a friend we have in Jesus,
all our sins and griefs to bear !
What a privilege to carry
everything to God in prayer !
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer ! | who will all our sorrows share ?
Jesus knows our every weakness :
take it to the Lord in prayer. |
| 2 Have we trials and temptations,
is there trouble anywhere ?
We should never be discouraged :
take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful | 3 Are we weak and heavy-laden,
cumbered with a load of care ?
Precious Saviour, still our refuge —
take it to the Lord in prayer !
Do your friends despise, forsake you ?
Take it to the Lord in prayer ;
in his arms he'll take and shield you,
you will find a solace there. |
- Joseph Medlicott Scriven (1819–1886)

Prayer

All powerful God,
we stand before you now,
basking in your loving gaze,
and lifting our hearts in worship and praise.

*The response after each line that follows is: **You are our unfailing treasure.***

All powerful God...
All trustworthy God...
Watchful God...
Mighty God...
Loving God...
God of the unknown...
God of the impossible...
God of all hope... **Amen.**

Scripture: St Luke’s Gospel Chapter 12 verses 32 – 40.

Reflection

Sometimes it takes a little time to see God’s plan laid out before us. With that in mind, when I hear Jesus say, “Sell your possessions and give to the poor,” I have to wonder: Does he mean for us to sell everything? It seems like quite a blanket statement on the face of it. “Sell your possessions” has no qualifiers. He didn’t say, “Sell half your possessions,” or “sell a tenth of your possessions.” He merely said, “Sell your possessions.” Frankly, it sounds like he wants us to sell it all. It really doesn’t make a lot of sense to do that. For one thing, if every Christian sold all their possessions and gave all the money to the poor, we would die out inside two weeks. I’m just guessing, but I’m pretty sure that’s not the Lord’s intent here. Being a guy who believes the Lord meant what he said; I’ve got to struggle with this one. Selling possessions and giving to the poor cannot be done unless we’re earning a livelihood. If we’re not working and producing, selling and giving things away will put us into the category of the down and out before too long. If we’re all poor, we’ll all starve. I’m quite sure that’s not God’s plan for the human race.

It sounds like Jesus wants us to be productive and then be generous with what we’ve earned. In so doing, we will be investing in God’s kingdom. Our treasure will be in heaven, and our hearts will follow. It sounds easy, but it takes a lot of courage to live like that.

Jesus understood this, which is why he led into our passage by saying, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.” In order to live a life of generosity, we must first place our trust in the Lord. We must have enough confidence in him that we expect him to come through for us. If our giving is significant, there will be times when we will be the ones in need. Do we trust God enough to provide in those times?

I’ve heard people say that we should live by faith in such a way that, if the Lord doesn’t provide, we won’t make it. That, my friends, is a life lived close to the edge. I’m not sure I would be very relaxed living like that. Like most

of you, I feel more comfortable when there are a few pounds in the bank. On the other hand, when I'm invested in the things of God, my heart resides with him and my faith grows as I see him provide. Jesus is basically telling us to go for it — be generous. God's got our back. While everyone was trying to absorb what Jesus was telling them, he launched into two short parables. At first sight, these parables seemingly have no relation to what he had just said about possessions. However, a closer look provides us with a deeper connection than first perceived.

The first story Jesus told concerns servants waiting for their master to return home from a wedding reception. They didn't know when he would get back, so they were admonished to be ready and on the alert for his return. Jesus noted that the man could arrive home at any hour of the day or night — even as late as daybreak. Still, the servants should be “dressed and ready for service” (Luke 12:35).

This story ties back into his previous parable about the rich fool (Luke 12:13-21) whose life was required of him before he got to enjoy the fruit of his labours. Like him, these servants are up against a timetable without a clock. They don't know when their services will be required. They just have to be ready when the time comes. The final line of the second parable explains the real meaning. “You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him” (Luke 12:40).

The link becomes obvious when we think about our lives and our possessions in terms of time. We don't know when our lives will be required of us. We don't know when Jesus will return for us. Neither do we know how long we will have our possessions and wealth. Anything can happen. We've seen these things occur in the lives of others, and we could be next.

The question for us then becomes one of service. Are we in service to the master now, or are we waiting for some other time to be faithful with what we have? Are we currently using our means (our wealth and possessions) to be of service in God's kingdom? Are we investing in heaven now by coming to the aid of humanity? If we do the latter, we position our hearts with the Son of Man rather than with our own selfish desires.

The second of the two parables is virtually identical in meaning. It's only one verse long — one sentence. In Luke 12:39 Jesus simply states, “But understand 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.” The watchword of these two related parables is readiness. Be ready to serve at any time. Don't wait for some future date to be generous with your time, your wealth, or your possessions. That date might never arrive.

This, I suppose, begs a couple of questions: “When should we serve,” and “How often should we be expected to give?” Verse 35 says everything we need to know about this. Be ready. Be prepared. Have the mind and heart of a servant 24/7. The idea is not to keep tabs on the number of times we give or the amount we offer. The idea is to be ready, willing, and able. If this is our state of preparedness when opportunities for service and giving arise, we'll be of a mind and heart to jump in to do our part.

The actual context for most of Jesus' teachings in Luke chapter twelve is a question posed in verse thirteen. Someone had asked Jesus to intervene in a dispute over a family inheritance. Jesus' immediate retort indicated in no uncertain terms that he was not an arbiter in such matters (nor did he care to be such). He warns the quarrellers against greed and tells them the Parable of the Rich Fool who dies. His overall point in all of what follows is this. If we're following Christ, our possessions are his, we are his, and our heart is his. What we own will become secondary. Everything we are and have will be positioned for service to our Lord.

There's a slightly different way of looking at this as well. That way is the way of expectation. When you're expecting someone, your heart and thoughts are with them. If we're expecting Jesus, we'll have a heart for his work. Our thoughts will be aligned with his will for our lives. Our possessions (including our very lives) will be implements of his grace, mercy, and compassion. We will be doing what we can to usher his kingdom into the lives of those around us. If he has won our hearts, the blessings he has bestowed upon us will be expendable in our quest to serve him well.

In verse 39, Jesus speaks of a thief. The owner of the house must be ready for the thief who would come and steal into his home. The Son of Man (Jesus) is not a thief of that sort. Yet, he steals our hearts. We want him to be near to us. We expect him to come. Thus, we are always ready and waiting for him to show up. We don't have to think about it, we just are. And show up he does. He comes on our scene in so many ways. If we're willing to see Jesus in the faces, hearts, and lives of those around us, he shows up in myriads of ways. It's our calling — it's his voice echoing out across the circumstances of life.

Jesus is the love of our lives. As such, we recognize him as the real owner of the things we like to call “our possessions.” They're not ours — they're his. We are merely trustees. He has entrusted us with blessings to be

used in his work. The return is guaranteed.

When Jesus is the true love of our lives, we're always ready to serve him. We're waiting for the opportunities to do so. When he arrives on the scene, we're there to greet him — to tell him we love him — to offer our service in whatever ways we've been equipped to do so.

When Jesus is the love of our lives, our hearts belong to him. Our trust is in him and his provision for us. We are inheriting a kingdom — the kingdom of God. If we're looking to a bottom line, we can be assured that our assets will always outgain our losses. Jesus' opening words in the passage then become truly significant. "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12: 32 NRSV)

Prayers of Intercession

We pray...

for those living on the edge, in fear of the future:
bless them with a deepening sense of hope and trust in you;

for those caught up in the ways of the world,
relying on worldly treasures:
give them a blessing of release and joy in you;

for those battling with ill health:
give them the blessing of strengthening hope and healing;

Hymn – STF 345 – And can it be

Watch on You tube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQeIGbKqiw8>

- 1 And can it be that I should gain
an interest in the Saviour's blood ?
Died he for me, who caused his pain ?
For me, who him to death pursued ?
Amazing love ! How can it be
that thou, my God, shouldst die for me ?
- 2 'Tis mystery all : the Immortal dies !
Who can explore his strange design ?
In vain the first-born seraph tries
to sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mercy all ! Let earth adore,
let angel minds enquire no more.
- 3 He left his Father's throne above —
so free, so infinite his grace —
emptied himself of all but love,
and bled for Adam's helpless race.

for all who have the responsibility of leading your flock:

give them your blessing of wisdom and strength.
Lord, you watch and protect.

Strengthen all who are in need
with an unshakeable trust in you;
give them a glimpse of the treasures
that are theirs when they put their hope in
you. **Amen.**

Our Father, who art in heaven

'Tis mercy all, immense and free ;
for, O my God, it found out me !

4 Long my imprisoned spirit lay
fast bound in sin and nature's night ;
thine eye diffused a quickening ray —
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,
my chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.

5 No condemnation now I dread ;
Jesus, and all in him, is mine !
Alive in him, my living Head,
and clothed in righteousness divine,
bold I approach the eternal throne,
and claim the crown, through Christ, my own.

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

Blessing

The blessing of Almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit
be with you and those you love, this day and for ever more. **Amen**