

Luke 12:32-40

32“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 33Sell 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. 34For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. 35“Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; 36be 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. 37Blessed 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. 38If 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. 40You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

SERMON

How many of us hear something like “Just wait til your Father gets home” when this Gospel reading comes around? The whole thing is kind of confusing anyway...is Jesus the thief? master? a groom? wedding guest? householder? Who are we? the servants? the sheep?

It’s as if Jesus is throwing all sorts of stuff against the wall in hopes something might stick. We might think this is one of those appeals to us to individually to get our act together.

I think that misses the point. Whatever Jesus is saying, it’s meant for a community of people. Suppose we envision what a hopeful community looks like when things don’t seem all that rosy?

Today's Gospel reading seems to break across a natural transition of topics —our relationship with stuff right into living expectantly; generously even. You caught the part about selling possessions and giving alms, right? The purse that never wears out reminds one of manna...or the inexhaustible daily bread and oil that feed a widow, her son and the prophet Elijah. In the tradition of the rabbis, Jesus calls us toward generosity saying to give to others is like giving to the Lord.

An acquaintance of mine was a short term missionary in Central America. She recalled people who had nearly nothing demonstrating the sort generosity with meals and hospitality she had never seen before. Hopeful people. Generous people. Might their generosity reflect something of God's loving ways...that 'thing we call the kingdom?'

We're used to being nice rule followers so we're always looking for instructions. So we might miss Jesus' assurances that it's the Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom. Unpacking what kingdom is all about is a huge job all by itself...that's likely Jesus tells all those stories.

God's realm is like stumbling across treasure you'd sell the farm to get—or finding treasure you had given up as lost—or a lost child finding the way home. Jesus imagines God's rule being like parties, vineyards or weddings where people find reconciliation, healing, forgiveness, and joy.

The second thing Jesus says that I've only recently noticed is that when the master comes and the door is opened, it's the master who begins serving and feeding. Sets to mind when Jesus says he comes not to be served, but to serve.

Being ready may well mean an openness to all the ways God's love shines in us, through us and around us. Sounds a bit like an Advent sermon.

Oddly, we eagerly await the thief. We even set the table in hopes we'll be burgled.

A preacher named Alyce McKenzie blends Jesus' images of a late night dinner with the thief's break in. She recalls a speech given at her daughter's graduation from culinary school. The speech introduces some of us muggles to a phrase *mise en place*—putting things in place. Chefs and people of hospitality arrange their work spaces so they can create and nurture others. Hopefulness and Advent (even in August) might move us church folk to an ethic of *mise en place*. .

The preacher connects such expectancy to the thief's intrusion by declaring that Jesus's brand of thieving robs us of our false priorities and it seeks to overturn structures of injustice.

Might our self protecting impulses be an obstacle, getting in our own way and in God's way? A hopeful *Mise en place* includes rigorous inner work — thinking, deciding and acting. Hopeful people yearn for God to liberate the oppressed and the oppressor alike. Hopeful people live in expectation that a loving God delights in creating the path home and showing it to us....and walking it with us. Amen.