

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Conspiring with the Holy Thief

Luke 12:32-40

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Analysis by Lori A. Cornell

[Jesus said:] 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."



Mural painting from the catacomb of Commodilla. One of the first bearded images of Jesus, late 4th century.

Jesus, Good Shepherd, Master, and Holy Thief uses every divine resource to bless us. We who have been slaves to lesser treasures than heaven, recognize a better Master. And knowing Jesus as Christ, we make it our purpose to live awake.

DIAGNOSIS: Very Afraid

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Afraid? Who Me?

Fear is one of those “trigger words” in Scripture: Any time Jesus tells us to not be afraid, we should immediately wonder what we need to be afraid of. And, admittedly, there is a lot to fear: Our climate is in crisis, and consequently so are we. Wildfires rage across France and Spain and the California Redwoods are threatened. As we brace for another variant of COVID, the World Health Organization warns us about the dangers of the highly infectious Monkey Pox. Inflation. And, as if that weren’t enough, autocracy is on the rise. We citizens of the developed world thought we had this civilization-thing under control. But evidence testifies to the contrary.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Afraid Sheep

Interesting that Jesus addresses a “little flock” when talking about fear, though, isn’t it? Jesus seems to be suggesting that his own followers are filled with fear. In fact, that fear is getting in the way of us trusting God. Jesus seems to be suggesting that our faith is like a poorly-made purse that wears out: not sturdy enough to handle the treasures of heaven; its straps easily clipped and ripped from a shoulder; its fibers poorly woven and its fabric susceptible to the devastation of moths.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Hearts in the Wrong Places

The problem is, when we sew purses for ourselves, we end up customizing them to fit treasures that have little to do with heaven. They aren’t sturdy enough to hold the Father’s unfailing treasure—only the treasures of some lesser gods, so they fray and self-destruct, and we are left empty handed. Our self-

serving purses, full of our accumulated possessions, prove unreliable. We come to our end, and not only are the things we carry worthless, but the purse is worn out. While we've been thinking life was about accumulating stuff, God has witnessed the death-grip these possessions have on us. Because we are unable to let go of the fleeting treasures of earth, we miss the unfailing treasure in heaven. The old adage, "You can't take it with you," proves true: Death, that unholy thief, kills our illusions—plundering us not just of earthly goods, but breath.



"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.

Luke 12:35-36

Photo by Gadiel [Lazcano](#) on [Unsplash](#)

PROGNOSIS: Unafraid

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Facing Fear in the Cross

How strange, then, that God sends us a Shepherd who recognizes our fear and is willing to stoop in service to our unrealized need—despite being our Master: Jesus tightens his belt and combats our sin and death by confronting it on the cross. There, despite all evidence to the contrary, Jesus becomes a Holy Thief, plundering sin and death of their ultimate power. His resurrection body bears witness that, once and for all, God gets the last word about his own; he makes us heirs to the kingdom. The Master serves the servants by giving us new life.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Blessed Slaves

Jesus, Good Shepherd, Master, and Holy Thief uses every divine resource to bless us. We who have been slaves to lesser treasures than heaven, recognize a better Master. And knowing Jesus as Christ, we make it our purpose to live awake. Not only do we begin to see the fleeting nature of earthly treasures, but we also see how they lure us into treating them (faithlessly) as gods. We strive to be more vigilant. And while we acknowledge that we will likely grow bleary eyed again, we trust that the Master in his faithfulness will return bearing heaven's demands in our place. So we pray, "Your kingdom come," because we want to be part of it.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Complicit with the Holy Thief

Awake to what Christ has done for us, we begin to expect that our world is due for a holy break-in. In fact, we rehearse it in worship: We plead for Christ's presence in song and prayer, we lift the bread and the cup, and we commune, but we know that Jesus is the host who fastens his belt to serve us. Our hearts

stay attentive and expectant of this gentle Master who we also know as Holy Thief. He may be planning a surprise return, but by his grace we ask to become accomplices in his great heist: inviting others to cast aside fear, surrender their earthly burdens, and have their hearts stolen by a God of grace.