

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

KINGDOM LIVING UNDER PROMISE

Luke 12:32-40

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14)

Analysis by Norbert E. Kabelitz

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.'

DIAGNOSIS: Three Steps to Bankruptcy in God's Kingdom

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Worry, Anxiety*

Fearful concerns are addressed in the verses that precede this text (12:22) and again in v. 32 in this text. (While St. Paul

can express such concern in positive ways, as in pastoral care for the churches, 2 Cor. 11:28), here we are overwhelmed by a toxic anxiety produced by preoccupation with possessions which seem to insure our livelihood and feed our self interest. Is that why it is hard to preach about money, a taboo topic in church life? How are we striving for the kingdom when survival interests overwhelm Kingdom interests? How do we deal with church budgets that cut back on mission to pay for buildings and utilities? Maintenance over mission. Who among us risks selling possessions to give alms (v. 33)? Would there be an alternate support system such as Luke 8:1-3 describes?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – Distrust, Covetousness

How do we talk about wealth and possessions today? Is wealth a reward for work well done or a trust to be shared? Or does it infect us with “the love of money, root of all evil (1 Tim. 6:10)? Is it true that our worry and anxiety for survival results in an unhealthy distrust of God, and coveting in less interest in the Kingdom and lack of generosity toward the needy among us? Isn’t such distrust and grasping the pursuit of a pagan heart? Isn’t such pagan interest ignorant of the God who is aware of our basic needs (v. 30)? Do not the world’s values become a “dog eat dog and the devil take the hindmost?” or “I got mine! You get yours!”

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – Bankruptcy

Purses wear out, earthly treasures get discounted, thieves and white collar interests cash in, wardrobes become moth eaten. If we do not live (or give) “as to Him,” how will God’s Kingdom good come among us? Don’t we then have God as our adversary? The problem is not possessions per se, for didn’t Jesus say “strive for His Kingdom and these things will be given you as well” (v. 31)? The problem is that the pursuit of pleasure and security as a definition of life makes us callous to the sufferings of

others and apathetic toward God: idolatry and injustice become the diseased fruit. We are left bankrupt in God's eyes, "for you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing. You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked" (Rev. 3:17). And "in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and now experience many pains" (1 Tim. 6:10). As someone said, "Aim for earth and you lose both heaven and earth. Aim for heaven and God gives you both earth and heaven."

PROGNOSIS: God the Giver Overwhelms Us with His Promise

"Lord, if I am to keep Promises, then open my senses, focus my spirit, hear my anger, see my fear, send me friends, and keep telling your Promise to me!" (Herbert Brokering, Lord If, CPH 1977).

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – God's Initiative as Giver

"Do not be afraid!" (v. 32). Words of comfort and affirmation. "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Isn't that promise backed up by the God who "gave His only Son?," heaven's treasure given to set us free to be people of God? God is pleased to ransack heaven's treasure-house and gift it to us as an asset that does not rot or decay (v. 35). Our bankruptcy is covered by God's assets. Is that why we say, "Jesus priceless treasure?" "He became poor that we might become rich" (2 Cor . 8:9)? A new economy of grace. How else can we pray "Forgive us our debts?" Steve Kuhl says, "Amazingly, the Father doesn't mind! He is actually pleased at the Son's resourcefulness (Lk. 16:1-13), pleased that He has made a way for these riches to be made available to us" (Sabbatheology for 10 Pentecost 2001). And is it not so that our Lord fulfills His role as Host by having us eat and drink the Supper He has

prepared, until He comes?

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – Healing Our Distrust/Dis-Ease

Such Gospel word and action overwhelms our distrust and cuts away the cancer of covetousness. With treasure invested in the Kingdom, our heart follows, It is a faith transaction that sets us free. Trust Me! Whatever form it takes in our day to “sell all and give alms,” what you do has the backing of heaven. Words of comfort for disciples called to risk a lot, maybe everything for the Kingdom which in His person Jesus brings near. Pastors, missionaries, lay leaders, who have tried it will testify: God keeps His promises! Note this observation by Craddock: “It is striking that churches timid and tentative on the subject of money have taught and preached the reverse of v. 34, making appeals for the listener’s hearts on the assumption that where the heart is, there the treasure will be. After reaping a harvest of hearts but very little support for the budget, some have come to acknowledge the realism of Jesus’ words: where the possessions are, there the heart will be also” (Interpretation, p. 164).

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – Life under Promise

To believe and do has many forms and ways. Jesus’ word provides a new focus for what life is all about by giving us two images and two parables (vv. 35-40). Set free from anxiety, fears and possessiveness, the images propose “be prepared and awake.” The parables are a call to what some describe as “eschatological living.” Herb Brokering puts it this way: “If You are ahead of us, and also coming to meet us, then we are somewhere in-between, and we have you both coming to us and going.” Translated into faith action: Being rich is having something to give. You can’t take it with you but you can send it on ahead.. True wealth is not what you possess but what you give away. You lose what you keep, you gain what you give away. “They are not

fools who lose what they cannot keep to gain what they cannot lose" (missionary saying).

This step (Step 6) seeks an answer to the question: What should matter to a faith-motivated donor? What has the in-breaking of the kingdom of God to do with how we live out our life under our gracious God? Jesus is very clear that one's worldly treasures, whatever kind, have the potential to get in the way of one experiencing the freedom of God's gracious reign through Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. But where worldly treasures exist to serve God's world, Christian freedom is not only known but practiced with and through worldly treasures.

P.S. Good background reading: The Living Pulpit. Issues: Vol 6 No. 3 July-Sept 1977 on "Money" and Vol. 12 Apr-June 2003 "Wealth". Available at 2114 Rt 9, Germantown, NY 12526.