

# Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

**READY OR NOT, HERE I COME!**

**Luke 12:32-40**

**Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost**

**Analysis by Cathy Lessmann**

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

*Note: I am referencing the beautiful promise God makes to Israel in Ezekiel 34, esp. verses 11-16, in which he promises to be their Good Shepherd and end their exile. Specifically, God will "rescue them" (v. 12); "gather them"; "bring them into their own land" (v. 13); "bind up the injured" (v. 16); "make them lie down"(v. 15); and "feed them on the mountains" (v. 13).*

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## **DIAGNOSIS: Not Ready (for the Kingdom)**

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) :** *Clutching, Stingy, Stressed*

Jesus encountered confusion from those around him (his disciples, the crowds, the leaders) regarding the nature of “the kingdom” he was ushering in. Even today, the same confusion abounds because everyone, then and now, assumes that such a kingdom involves worldly “treasures,” like possessions, power, prestige, prosperity, and so on. After all, aren’t such treasures gifts from God, rewards for “good” faith/behavior? Wouldn’t it be imperative then, we argue, to carefully guard and protect such gifts/treasures, even if that might make us, mmmm....shall we say, overly-protective of them—as in stingy? (All in the name of responsible stewardship no less.) Strange too, that our protective behaviors cause us so much stress and anxiety.

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) :** *To Trust or Not to Trust ... (that is the question)*

We worry, are anxious, because apparently, deep down, we’re afraid we could lose our treasures, which in turn could jeopardize our futures! Just the thought of it makes us emotional wrecks. Jesus explains, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (v. 34). But, as Hamlet recognized (“Aye, there’s the rub!”), what we clutch so desperately is not THE kingdom – at least, not the one God had promised Israel—the return to his sheepfold as described in Ezekiel 34 (and other places). The problem now becomes twofold: not only is the Kingdom misunderstood, but because it is, the One-who-comes-to-inaugurate-it, Jesus, is left severely undervalued. To wit, Jesus’ contemporaries just didn’t see anything very “remarkable” about him; they were always testing to see if

he could deliver either a Roman-upset or some spectacular treasure. When he wouldn't deliver, they simply wrote him off (and eventually rubbed him out). But aren't we current-day followers equally ho-hum about Jesus too, not really expecting all that much from him? We discount him for being so, well.....irrelevant, not noticing the connection between our hearts' obsessions and our lack of confidence in him.

**Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem)** : *Omitted from the Flock*

Such lack of trust, Jesus says, signals a critical case of unreadiness which in turn bodes a grave consequence: being caught unawares, not being ready and so missing out on the Kingdom when it arrives. Not only do we stand to lose the treasures we do have, but (to use the metaphors Jesus used) we will miss the master's (think Good Shepherd's) arrival and the banquet he throws, the luscious pastures, the healing, the promised rest. In short, the promise just won't come true for us and we stand to lose what we fear losing the most—our futures.

## **PROGNOSIS: Ready and Readied**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution)** : *“Ready or Not, Here I Come!”*

But now, Jesus utters the most comforting words ever spoken— “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (v. 32). In other words, God is going to keep his promise after all no matter what, no matter how unready everyone is! And when he does, he offers everyone the opportunity of their lifetime—*carte blanche* restoration in his “sheepfold,” i.e., citizenship in that Kingdom where citizens get treated like, in fact actually become heirs apparent! We learn how very expensive this promise is for the Good Shepherd to keep as we see Jesus, the “Son of Man” (v. 40), willingly give up his future exactly to

secure it for all humanity.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) :** *Back in the Flock and Fear-less*

That promise comes “true” for everyone who accepts it, and then it remarkably transforms them. Hearts change so radically that they begin to operate differently: they adopt the *modus operandi* of the new Kingdom, i.e., interact on the basis of mercy-and-forgiveness rather than reciprocity. These reconstituted hearts focus NOT on treasures and treasure-maintenance, but rather on the Promise-Keeper and his astonishing cohort. It’s amazing the relief that comes with this switch: worries and anxieties simply melt away when futures are entrusted to the Good Shepherd.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) :** *Readily Generous*

In addition, Promise-trusters are READY and READIED for action and ENJOY their life in the new Kingdom. They anticipate their master’s arrival, recognize him when he comes, in whatever guise, luxuriate in his presence, and enjoy all he does for/with them. “Truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them” (v. 37). Attitudes regarding treasures have made an about-face. Since they are no longer needed to guarantee the future, they are now simply regarded as useful in sharing/spreading the Kingdom. Jesus’ advice to “Sell 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” (v. 33) becomes the new, logical, way of operating.