

3/15/21 WORSHIP SERVICE

WELCOME

Good morning. While outside is cold and damp, we are gathered in the warmth of this space and in the warmth of our homes to worship the God of Jesus together.

Today we will continue with the Gospel of Luke as part of our series on Jesus as the Upside Down King. We look forward to hearing from Karl's children's story, and from Lois' teaching.

As we follow Jesus, while he walks the way toward the cross, we are challenged by Jesus' upside-down teaching on possessions.

- Greeting time
- Opportunities for Celebration and Service
- Rosebud for Cameron Michelle Esau
- Call to Worship

PRAYER OF INVOCATION – ATTR. ALCUIN (8TH CENTURY) (VT 860)
Almighty God,

To you all hearts are open, all desires are known.
and from you no secrets are hidden.

Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit
that we may perfectly love you
and worthily magnify your holy name,
through Christ, our Lord. Amen

MORNING PRAYER

Marvelous Creator and Redeemer,

This morning we humbly lift our hearts to you who are the Source and owner of all things.

You are the owner of every star and galaxy,
every tree and mountain,
every drop of rain,
the fruit of the land,
every cell in our bodies,
and every breath that we take.

What can we do with such humbling knowledge?

Help us to not hold on so tightly to the things we claim we own. Whether that hold prevents us from sharing, or whether that hold prevents us from the terrifying leap of faith into the dark that makes sense only when we have our trust in You who we do not own.

Help us to be less anxious today, to have eyes to see and ears to hear.

We offer prayers of thanksgiving for our church family.

We give thanks for the rain that has come to replenish the earth.

We thank you too, for teachers and students and all who are heading into spring break this week; grant rest and rejuvenation in these days.

We thank you the healing Les Flaming has experienced. We continue to pray for him as he recuperates and gains strength now at home.

We thank you for the increased availability of Covid-19 vaccine and the broad distribution of that vaccine.

We thank you for signs of hope in this pandemic.

We thank you that Bethesda home has begun allowing for visitation.

Yet we continue to pray for those around the world for whom the vaccine is not yet available, mindful that both nationally and globally this pandemic reveals a how divided we are between the haves and the have-nots.

We add our prayers of petition.

We pray for Rick Freeman's dad Ron who will be having open heart surgery on Wednesday. We pray for Ron, and Rick, and DJ that the surgery will go well, that Ron will be restored to greater health and that you'd be with the family in their anxiety and care for Ron.

We pray for others in our congregation in the difficult journey with health concerns that require constant trust in your provision.

You are our refuge and rock of our salvation.

You catch us when we stumble. Help us to not be afraid.

In the name of Jesus our rock, Amen

OFFERING PRAYER – PASTOR CALEB

God,

Take our lives to be yours for life in your kingdom.

Take our hands and feet, that they may move and act according to your will.

Take our minds and words to be used to glorify you and spread the good news.

Take our possessions and money, that they might be shared in your upside-down kingdom.

Take our love and multiply it, that we might find our true selves in Christ.

SERMON – PASTOR LOIS

Luke 12:13-34

I'm going to read from the NRSV, but I've asked Delton to put the NIV up, on the screen so you can just hear and see some of the subtle differences between the two, but they're very similar. You'll remember that last Sunday Pastor Caleb preached about the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples, upon their request, as it was recorded by Luke – it's a little different (and more familiar to us) from Matthew. Jesus went on then, teaching and challenging, he cast out a demon and was accused of his power coming from Beelzebul or, the ruler of demons. Luke often writes about Jesus teaching his followers to pay attention to their inner lives, to what's motivating them to behave in certain ways or make certain life decisions – to make sure that it's not hypocritical or just for appearances. He calls out the religious leaders of his times about this often. Here's today's text, Luke 12:13-34 -

Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

He said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouses nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you – you of little faith! And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailling treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Wealth and Worry

“Don’t be afraid,” Jesus said. “Sell your stuff and give the money to people who don’t have the stuff they need,” he said. “Don’t keep worrying about your basic needs – your basic needs will be met! Keep your focus on identifying and creating God’s upside down kingdom,” he said. Don’t worry. Don’t worry. Don’t worry. And don’t be afraid. Well... clearly, Jesus wasn’t living through a global pandemic. And he hadn’t just come through an extremely tumultuous and divisive political situation, right? But wait. Jesus lived in Palestine during the time of the Roman occupation; that was pretty extreme political tumult. And there were pandemic-like medical conditions during Jesus’ day... like leprosy. And, in Jesus’ time there were just a few super rich people who had virtually all the power while the majority was super poor and had virtually no power. So, it seems like once again, these difficult words of Jesus, spoken 2,000 years ago still are applicable for us today, so we still have some wrestling to do with this parable and with these words. Let’s unpack this a bit.

Someone “in the crowd” was always asking Jesus for something. In this case, it seems this fella’s older brother had apparently refused to give him his share of the family inheritance. In those days it wasn’t unusual for a rabbi, a teacher of the law to help settle these sorts of disputes. We can recall instances in Exodus and Numbers where we read about Moses being called on for these kinds of tasks – and he, rightfully acted as judge and arbiter. So, if the thought in people’s minds was that Jesus was another Moses returned in their midst to act as judge and Messiah it’s not hard to see why this man felt justified in asking Jesus to make this ruling in his favor. But Jesus wasn’t having it.

Helping this guy get his inheritance was NOT the reason he was here! He was trying to get people to think differently, to change their expectations and their perspectives, to re-focus their attention on God. So, to help with that, he told a parable, as he often did.

Now, right off the bat, we can observe that Jesus wasn’t saying that wealth is a bad thing. The land of a rich man produced abundantly. Apparently the guy was a good farmer and knew how to produce! He was a good steward, doing what he needed to do to create abundant production. No problem – well done, good and faithful servant! It’s just that, in God’s kingdom, abundance is a blessing from God that is to be shared with others, not stored for oneself. This was a lesson that Jesus’ people knew from way back. In Psalm 49 they would have read (as we read), “Why should I fear in times of trouble, when the iniquity of persecutors surrounds me, those who trust in their wealth and boast of the abundance of their riches?” They knew already way back in ancient Hebrew times that God reckoned with those who trust in their wealth rather than in God and who boast about their abundance of riches rather than about God. Jesus is telling a story about a guy whose fields brought forth abundantly, a blessing from God and the guys’ singular thought was, “I gotta build bigger bins and barns so I can broadcast my bounty.” Nope. Not the focus of attention that Jesus is after. Not the seeking of God and God’s kingdom. So, Jesus goes on, God says to the guy. “Go ahead! Build your bins and barns bigger so you can broadcast your bounty – but BOOM buddy! You’re dead. And none of your bounty matters. You’re just rich in stuff. You need to be rich toward God. And being rich toward God means that you understand your bounty not as yours, but as God’s and you are the distributor. This thought never seemed to cross the fellow’s mind. He could only think about storing it all up

for his own use. Look at the language he used: “I WILL do this. I WILL pull down MY barns and build larger ones, and there I WILL store all MY grain and MY goods. And I WILL say to MY soul...” And what he said to his soul was all about himself, eating, drinking and being merry. He has no thoughts about anyone else and no thoughts about God. And God calls him out – “You fool! And so it is for those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

There are four more alliterations that can be helpful to us in understanding this parable:

First, the guy was preoccupied with his possessions.

Second, he sought his security in self-sufficiency.

Third, he had a tight grasp on greed.

Fourth, he had the hollowness of hedonism. (New Interpreter’s Bible, Vol VIII, pg. 213)

As Jesus tells the crowd this parable, he describes the guy’s thoughts, his motivations, his inner workings. This is something that’s pretty difficult for us to do for one another – we can really only do it for ourselves. Jesus is asking his listeners to pay attention to their own inner lives, for each person to be honest about what makes them tick, how they make decisions, where their hearts are.

Then Jesus goes on with this group of sayings that focus on worry. Or, rather on NOT worrying. The Greek word is a verb. It indicates more than just a feeling, but is an action, a way of being – being worried, to take anxious thought, to put forth an effort or strive after. So not being this way can be understood as taking action, making decisions that are not controlled by anxiety. Now, I want to be careful here because I know that many of us struggle with anxiety and it’s not always just a matter of making decisions about it. Sometimes it is beyond our ability to control and we really need help with it.

For the sake of trying to understand this section of Luke, let’s dig a little deeper and see whether we can follow Jesus’ teaching here. I think there are three points that we can take from verses 22-34.

First, Jesus is reminding his listeners that when we have enough, but we continue to want more, we can quickly lose sight of who we are and what we are becoming. When we’re preoccupied with our possessions, we can lose our connection with God and begin to focus on what we have and how we will get more of it.

Second, as we look around and see the ways God tends to the needs of the small creatures in our world, we can renew our own trust in God’s care for us. We don’t need to seek our security in self-sufficiency.

Third, Jesus reminds us to use our good, common sense! Try to remember that all our anxiety, ultimately, does very little to help us solve our problems. It doesn’t make us taller or stronger, or more beautiful. It doesn’t help us live longer, or be better people. Anxiety is really pretty ineffective as tool for improving our lives.

Yet, anxiety or worry seems to be a by-product of being human. We can't really help it. And Jesus knew that; he surely experienced his own worry as he lived his life as a human, here on this earth. Maybe that's why he ended this section with these tender words: "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. And remember... where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Amen.

BENEDICTION – PASTOR CALEB

Seek first the upside-down kingdom of God and know that God will provide for our every need and multiply every gift we release from closed fists to open hands.