

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost - Year C

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Genesis 15:1-6

Psalm 33:12-22

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

Luke 12:32-40

08/07/2022

### **Gospel**

The Holy Gospel according St. Luke:

[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 unfailling 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.”

The Gospel of our Lord

### **Prayer**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

### **Afraid**

Good morning! Since the dawn of time Megan and I have always handled taking care of Ned the same way. Megan handles the mornings while I sleep in, and I take him out at night when she's ready for bed. This was probably a good thing at seminary, because the school was located in a rather shady part of town. I swear to you before God our savior that I heard gunshots every single night when I walked him. Now, while it was a bad part of town, things were relatively safe around the campus. And so it was that I found myself walking Ned one fall evening. I would basically loop around the apartment complex along the nearby back streets. On that blustery fall evening I found myself walking through some heavy fog. Now, this wasn't uncommon in Columbia, SC, but for some reason or another, it felt different this evening. Ned and I started our walk, looped left and came back down the side of the apartments and had just turned left on a side street. It was lit by one lone lamp half way down, and as we walked a solitary figure approached from the darkness.

I had come across people all the time during my walks, but for some reason or other I felt spooked by this one. I was convinced that this specter meant me harm, and I came to a stop. I pulled Ned close, put my other hand on my pocket knife inside my coat and continued walking. As we got closer we gave each other a look, and passed by on opposite sides of the street with nothing more happening than leaves rustling in the wind.

As I continued on my walk I thought about how absurd I had acted and felt. I mean, think about what the other guy was probably thinking?! Out of the darkness appeared a 6 foot man of not insignificant size with a

large coat walking a 75 lb dog. Those of you who know Ned understand how loving he is, but when he meets someone new, he's skittish. When he sees something out of the ordinary, he instantly comes alert, ears and tail up, making no noise as he assesses the situation. You and I know he wants a belly rub, but the stranger certainly didn't.

I was caught up in fear. And fear is the theme of the Gospel text this week. You may at first think the theme is about giving alms or stewardship, but it's not. Do you ever feel afraid? These past two and half years have certainly been fearful. Are you afraid now? Are you, like the Gospel lesson, confused about how you should feel? Or, maybe it's not fear at all. I certainly understand, the text doesn't really seem that very clear. The metaphors seemed mixed and confused. One scholar captures that confusion perfectly, writing *"It is not just the timing of God's apocalyptic appearance that remains mysterious. It is the function and character of that appearance—and the identity of God's very self. Is God's arrival to be longed for or dreaded? Wakeful readiness is key in either scenario; that much is clear. What is unclear is the mood of that hair-trigger anticipation. What is at stake? And who is this divine Mystery—this shepherd who breaks into homes, this master who returns from weddings to serve food to bleary-eyed servants?"*<sup>1</sup>

But after a few times reading the story it becomes clear that this mixing of metaphors is concerned with a specific type of fear, fear about the future, fear that we won't have enough, fear that we need more. It can be tempting to shy away from this Gospel lesson, to smooth things over, to blunt the edges of the harsh words. Because, at the end of the day, the text

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-19-3/commentary-on-luke-1232-40-5>

hits me just as hard too. “Where my treasure is, there my heart will be also.” And as I contemplated how to smooth things over, I read this VERY challenging paragraph: *“Jesus, with the wisdom of a patient shepherd, diagnoses the key factor in discerning one thief from the Other: fear (verse 32). More than this, he tells his little flock how fear can be overcome. “Sell your possessions” and “give alms” (verse 33). Don’t let your congregation off the hook with rationalizations here. Wake them up to themselves. Press the point. They have not sold all they have? Fine. When is the last time they have sold **anything** of genuine value and given it away? When is the last time they lived unafraid, slaves to a God who serves rather than an empire that destroys?”*<sup>2</sup>

WOW! Ouch! The commentator knows how to hit someone like me right where it counts. But they have a point, it’s such a radical solution that we don’t even begin to think that it’s possible. We dismiss it entirely, right away. “Well that just won’t work...” we say, but have we actually tried it? Now, I have one more quote that I want to read, and it extends this understanding of fear to include something else, anxiety. Listen to this:

*“When the rat race of materialism threatens to control you, remember Jesus’ words; there is more to life.*

*Followers of Jesus should be the freest persons—free from anxiety, free from social conventions of materialism, free with their generosity to others. The lives of Jesus’ disciples count for more than the pursuit of material wealth. They are devoted to higher things. This cluster of sayings offers both the challenge to center one’s life on promoting concerns related to God’s kingdom and the extravagant promise of God’s providence for those who will do so.*

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

*What changes would we make if we were as concerned about God's kingdom as we are about the size of next month's paycheck, the next harvest, or the next step up the career ladder? What value would we give to reconciling broken relationships, sharing the gospel of God's love, and working for peace and justice for the oppressed?*

*One of Jesus' most difficult words is this: 'Sell your possessions, and give alms' (v. 33). As in other parts of the Gospel, this saying contains a tension between two responses to the dangers of wealth and materialism. The first is divestment: 'Sell your possessions.' The second is generosity in almsgiving. In our culture, the latter has always been easier to consider than the first. Obviously, there are good reasons why divestment should not become the norm for all Christians. One the other hand, this provocative call needs to be considered. Most of us have possessions we do not need. Yet, we hold on to them while other persons are homeless and hungry. Perhaps it is time for churches to hold 'discipleship sales,' and call on all who will to sell all the goods they do not need in order to give to charities and human services. Such detachment from our materialism would also be a dramatic declaration of the values by which we live."<sup>3</sup>*

The point isn't just getting rid of the stuff, or giving money to whatever charity or organization you choose. Jesus is pointing out the love, the obsession, the way that the idol has become so important in our lives that we can't even think about getting rid of it in the first place, of living life free from it. That is what is so convicting. We all know we could give more, and we try. But when we think about all those things that pull at our heart, those desires that keep us up at night, those are the things that convict us. And it is freedom from that, which Jesus is offering.

Now. If you're like me, you're feeling overwhelmed. But I want you to take a deep breath. We're trying to get rid of anxiety and fear, not increase them exponentially! The good news is that God wants the best for us too! And God isn't going to leave us to figure it all out alone. Don't believe me? Just listen:

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<sup>3</sup> Keck, Leander E. *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*. Volume 8. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2015. p. 216.

*“1After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, ‘Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.’”<sup>4</sup>*

*“[Jesus said:] 32Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”*

Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> Genesis 15:1 NRSV