

**SERMON – 10/8/25**

Luke 12:32-40

When I was leading the midweek service one Wednesday recently I was speaking about Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount and I remarked that although people often say that they prefer to hear preachers speak about the teaching of Jesus than about the Old Testament or about the New Testament Letters, in actual fact it is usually far harder to take up the challenges that Jesus lays down than anything we might read in the Law of Moses or the teaching of the apostles.

At the midweek service, if I recall, I was speaking about Jesus' call to those who would follow Him not just to 'love your neighbour' but to 'love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you'. Loving our neighbour is hard enough but, as Jesus says, loving those who love you and greeting those you know already is easy in comparison with going out of your way to seek out those you struggle to get on with or who are actively making life difficult for you

If you want a straightforward Gospel message there it is – love your enemy. How about I give the benediction now and send you all out to get on with the job. There is the way to world peace in a nutshell. Love your enemy. But if we can't even live up to that on a one to one basis or in a quiet little community like Kinross it's not going to be any easier in Gaza or Ukraine.

I pondered long and hard this week about what verse from our reading to take as my text this morning because I could have taken just about any of the nine of them, some of them more familiar than others, all of them challenging, but I ultimately decided not to take any one of them as a key to the passage, instead seeking to reflect a little on all of them on the way through, encouraging all of us to listen for the particular challenges there may be here for each of us. And let me say now that I wouldn't be surprised if some of you were pleading with me to take a text from the Old Testament or from one of the New Testament letters next time!

In our reading this morning, there are a number of very thought-provoking statements any one of which could occupy us for a while. Jesus begins by saying: "Don't be afraid, little flock for

your Father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom.” (v.32) That could have been our text this morning, for here is a very intimate way of addressing His followers which we could profitably have explored – 'little flock' – would you like me to call you that week by week? Here too is a great promise, and remember it is addressed to you too, little flock: “Your Father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom.” (v.32) What does that mean, I wonder?

Or what about these famous words: “Where your treasure is your heart will be also.” (v.34) That will have been the text for many a challenging sermon and we could usefully have stopped there awhile.

Or again, Jesus says, “Understand this: if the owner of the house had known at what time the thief was coming he wouldn't have let his house be broken into.” (v.39) And He goes on: “You also must be ready because the Son of Man will come at an hour you don't expect Him.” (v.40) 'Be Ready' was the title I gave this sermon when I was preparing the preaching plan, and that could easily be the key message of a sermon, particularly perhaps in Advent.

We *will* come back to some of these statements as we go along, but I'd like to take us first to the six direct imperatives (commands) that Jesus gives us in the passage we read this morning, because this is where we hear the voice of Jesus at its most challenging, I think. They are helpfully grouped in three sets of two, in good Hebrew style.

First of all, Jesus says: “Sell your possessions and give to the poor.” (v.33) What if I had taken that verse as the text for this morning's sermon? What if those were to be the words that were ringing in your ears as you left here today and went to live out the Gospel in the week ahead. And it's not an isolated example of Jesus' teaching about our attitude to money and material things. During Family Week we looked at the parable of the pearl in which Jesus likens the Kingdom of heaven to a merchant who, on finding a single pearl of immense value – the Kingdom of God – sells everything he has in order to acquire this one thing. (Mt.13:46) Elsewhere, Jesus says: You cannot serve both God and money. (Mt.6:24) When the rich young ruler asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life, the Lord is

uncompromising in His reply: "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." (Mk.10:21) And, if you find this kind of thing a bit much to take, whatever you do, don't read the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts chapter 5.

So is that the text you would have liked this morning? "Sell your possessions and give to the poor." Of course, we need to note that although Jesus Himself eschewed material wealth during His earthly ministry and encouraged His disciples to live by faith and on the hospitality of strangers, they did depend on generous benefactors who supplied their physical needs one way or another and if all of those benefactors had already given away all they had to the poor I wonder how His mission would have been accomplished? Don't imagine that everything Jesus has to say about money and possessions is negative, because for every challenging teaching He has for those who *have* material goods, He has another teaching to challenge those who are *not* rich in the things of this world and who are worried about how they are going to make ends meet. "Do not worry about your life, Jesus says, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes." (Lk.12:22-23)

Both a surplus of the things of this world and a lack of them can distract us from trusting God, because *that* is the challenge to all of us: whatever our level of wealth or poverty Jesus calls us to trust *Him*. It doesn't matter whether in political terms you are a capitalist or a communist because neither of these human and material systems provide the way to inherit the Kingdom that is the gift of God.

Which leads us straight on to the second pair of imperatives in this morning's passage: "Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys." (v.33) I almost took *this* as the text for today's sermon because that image of a purse that doesn't wear out provoked so many questions in my own mind. When I thought about it, it seemed to me that the issue is not so much the receptacle for money but whether or not there is money to go in the receptacle! I am the kind of person that tends to use things until they are unusable and although I have

probably got through three or four wallets in my lifetime, I've never had one that has actually worn out. So is there really much of a call for a purse that will not wear out? Maybe it says more about the genes I inherited from my Aberdonian granny than about the amount of money that has ever passed through my wallet, but I'm conscious that my calling has given me the privilege of not having to worry about earning a living or maintaining a house because I trust that through the regular offerings of God's people, whether the widow's mite or the generosity of those who are wealthier, you as a congregation have promised to take care of my material needs for as long as I am among you, so that I can have the time and space to devote myself to taking care of the spiritual needs of this community.

Perhaps the second saying in this pair of imperatives makes it clearer that what Jesus means is that our focus should not be on *any* physical purse or wallet but on the heavenly treasure, God's gift of the Kingdom, which is from everlasting to everlasting and is not subject in any way to the ravages of moths or rust or robbery. What if I had taken this second pair of challenges as the text for this morning's sermon? What if I were to ask you straight out where you think your greatest treasure is? Where would your focus be? It might indeed be the careful stewarding of your bank balance or the jar with your weekly housekeeping in it or your next meeting with the firm that manages your extensive investment portfolio. Then again it might be your wardrobe or your display cabinet full of collectables or your library of books or your music collection or your pride and joy in the garage that you spend all weekend polishing or the garden that you put every spare moment into tending or whatever you put your heart and soul into, for as Jesus says, "Where your treasure is your heart will be also." (v.34) Where is *your* heart? The big question is this: Is your treasure something that can be stolen or eaten by moths or rusted away or for that matter damaged in a storm or a flood or a fire, or is your treasure something that will not fail? Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will never pass away." (Mt.24:35)

So maybe I was right to go with my initial instinct and entitle this sermon 'Be Ready!' and to take the third pair of imperatives as this morning's text: "Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning." (v.34) In His teaching Jesus often takes this

image of waiting and being ready. Think of the parable of the faithful and unfaithful servants that follows this passage in Luke's Gospel, or the parable of the wise and foolish girls recorded for us in Matthew's Gospel, or indeed the parable of the talents or the other stories where a monarch or a landowner goes off on a journey and nobody knows quite when to expect them back. The common message is that although life may often seem to be about waiting for the next thing to happen, that waiting does not have to be aimless – in fact it should be purposeful because if we believe that God is sovereign then there is eternal significance in every moment of life and we should be ready to discern what God may be saying at any time, to recognise Christ in every encounter and conversation, to keep in step with the Spirit. In the words of Brian Wren's hymn: 'We strain to glimpse your mercy seat and find you kneeling at our feet.' Are you ready to meet Jesus? Today and in the coming week and at the very hour you don't expect Him?

You could have had nine different sermons this morning. (Maybe you feel as if I've been talking for as long as nine sermons!) There has been no single verse as a text for this morning and perhaps it will be many different things that people take away today. What is Jesus challenging you with, I wonder? Perhaps you would have been more comfortable with something from the Old Testament or some straightforward teaching from the New Testament letters

Let me read you all nine verses again as we close. Listen for God's Word to *you*, then come and sit with that message at the Table, then go into the coming week following where Jesus is leading you.

Jesus said: "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him.

It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will make them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.

It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or towards daybreak.

But understand 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.

You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."