

Luke 12:32-40

The treasure of the kingdom

12:32 "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

12:33 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.

12:34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

12:35 "Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit;

12:36 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.

12:37 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.

12:38 If he comes during the middle of the night or near dawn and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.

12:39 "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.

12:40 You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

The Homily for Sunday, August 10, Proper 14C

Do not be afraid, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

As Richard Rohr has put it in considering another of the fifteen times in the Gospels in which eternal life is described in terms of a wedding feast: "God has always had a very hard time giving away God. No one seems to want this gift."

Let's consider the two parables of Jesus given us in today's reading, and let's consider the second of the two parables first.

I will embellish it in the telling.

In this second one, a householder awakens from night slumbers to the sense that something is off. He rises and puts his feet to the floor, and without bothering to slip his feet into sandals or to wrap a robe around him, he opens the door from his bedroom to see the evidence. Someone has been in his house. A pane of glass has been carefully removed from a window; he can feel the draft. The sofa has been moved; it is not quite as he left it. And then with a groan he realizes that his secret compartment under a tile under that sofa must have been the object of the burglar. And sure enough, his prize collection of rare coins is gone!

"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."

This is a parable about our resistance to the gift that God wants to give us. This is about viewing God's approach to us in a negative way, God as a burglar who wants to rob us of our treasure.

And now for the first of the two parables. Another household, another night time scene.

It is late. The household servants are drooping with fatigue after a long day on duty. They long for their beds, but the master of the household left hours ago for a wedding banquet, and he's not home yet, and the expectation of servants is that they be there to tend to the needs and whims of the master, so they prop themselves up and fight sleep.

And then in the wee hours just before dawn there is a commotion in the yard, the unmistakable voice of their master, obviously tipsy, slurring out a bawdy song. The door opens with a flourish and - to borrow the language of Robert Capon in describing this scene - the master bursts into the room, "a chilled bottle of Dom Perignon in each tail of his coat, and a breakfast to end all breakfasts in his hands: bacon, sausage, grits, homefries, and eggs sunny-side up, too."

This is a parable of the delight God has in us, of the abundance and joy that God wants for us. This delight and abundance and joy is in God's very nature, and we, created in God's image, are meant to share in this life of God and have that life grow in us until we are made over into the very likeness of God.

"Do not be afraid, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

Jesus' admonition notwithstanding, fear sells. Throughout history there are Christians who have told us stories about God to threaten us with a picture of a God who condemns, obscuring for us the radical, profligate, excessive, wasteful Love of God which Jesus announces over and over again.

If we believe that negative account, rather than what Jesus is telling us about how what God wants for us is a feast of plenty, then these words of Jesus which end our Gospel selection sound ominous and threatening:

"You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

We can hear this as a threat, or a promise, depending on which of today's parables describe our attitude, and our attitudes are formed by our experience of life, the stories we've believed about ourselves.

Is God a burglar in the night who wants to rob us of what we treasure?

Or is God the one who comes to us in our weary night to fill us with delicious abundance?

"Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

And so it is our opportunity each day to receive this gift that God so delights to give us, and to pass it on. The kingdom of God, after all, is a description of a whole web of renewed relationships, of kinship, of recognizing that the treasures of God are hidden in each one of us. Jesus invites us, in the following words, to set our hearts on this treasure.

"Sell your possessions and give alms. Make purses for yourselves which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven."

And so, to wrap this up, here's a story about a saint of God who received the kingdom, who laid hold of the treasure that can never be lost.

The story of Laurence the deacon is commemorated on August 10 (today) each year, and it comes to us from the time of the persecution under the Emperor Valerian in the Third Century CE:

As Sixtus was led away to be jailed and tortured, he gave all the treasures of the church into Laurence's care to be dispensed to the poor. Blessed Laurence then sought out Christians by day and by night, and ministered to all according to their needs.... The soldiers, hearing of money, took Laurence and presented him to the general Decius. Decius said to him, "Where is the church's money, which we know is hidden with you?"

Laurence requested a delay of three days. During the three days Laurence brought together the poor, the lame, and the blind, and then presented them before Decius in the palace, saying, "See here the eternal treasure, which never diminishes but increases. It is divided among these people and is found in all of them, for their hands have carried the treasure off to heaven."

-Jacob of Voragine ca.1230-1298

The Golden Legend (quoted from Gail Ramshaw's Treasures Old and New: Images in the Lectionary)

Let us pray:

O God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may so perceive your good pleasure in giving us the kingdom that we become wholly yours, completely dedicated to you; and then use us, we pray you, as you will, and always to your glory and the welfare of all the kin you have given us; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. (after Prayer 61 of the BCP)