

Discipleship in the Lectionary – 08/07/2022



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Revised Common Lectionary Year C

Sunday, August 7th

Luke 12:32-40

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Being ready for Christ

The Gospel lection this week follows the theme of the second half of the lectionary year which transitioned at Pentecost from a focus on "Who is Christ" to one of "What does it mean to follow Christ?" Over the last two weeks the focus was prayer (11:1-13) and the right perspective on life relative to the seductive power of wealth (12:13-21). This week the topic is to live life being ready for Christ's return.

Luke 12:32-40

³² "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

The opening verse this week helps to put what follows into appropriate perspective. "*Fear not...*" in Scripture is an exhortation typically followed by something powerful and positive. This case is no different. The disciples should be confident that the Kingdom is coming, and they will be part of it. The phrase, "*fear not,*" also must be seen in the context of the passage it follows (12:22-31). Here Jesus exhorts his disciples not to be anxious about life, about food, health, or clothing. He says to His disciples, "*...your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom and these things will be added to you*" (12:30b,31).

"*Little flock*" is only found here in the New Testament. It is symbolic of both the small number of true disciples and the amount of personal attention each sheep will receive from the shepherd. The term is also reminiscent of Isaiah 40:11 and Ezekiel 34:12, suggesting Jesus thought of His disciples as a body with religious significance.

Jesus then contrasts earthly riches with heavenly treasure. The idea of selling earthly possessions and giving the proceeds away is not meant to apply to all Jesus' followers. Luke has already described women following Jesus and supporting the group out of their own resources (Luke 8:1-3). There is also the example of Martha owning a house (Luke 10:38). The issue at stake is not the ownership of private property but the avoidance of a life being dominated by such. Our energies and focus are always with the things we value most. Trust in earthly possessions prevents trust in God. At the same time, the second half of the statement, "*...and give to the needy*" illustrates the central role of generosity in the life of the Christian.

³⁵ "Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, ³⁶ and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. ³⁷ Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them. ³⁸ If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants! ³⁹ But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. ⁴⁰ You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

This section is naturally interpreted by many as eluding to being ready for the second coming. Others suggest this passage also addresses being ready to face any crisis that may befall a Christian in his or her ministry. In the original Greek, v. 35 begins "*Let your loins stay girded*" (See Exodus 12:11). This is an image of a man ready to run. His long robe is tucked into his belt out of the way. This is a call to be constantly ready. Jesus uses the image of servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding feast. The servants do not know when the master will return so they must stay awake and be ready. As soon as he knocks, they will open the door immediately and let him in. Jesus then describes what will happen if the master finds in servants in a state of readiness. The roles will be reversed, and the master will serve the servants. This conjures up images of the end-time messianic banquet (Luke 13:19; 14:15-24; 22:27-30; Revelation 19:9). Whether the Jewish three-watches or the Roman four-watches is referred to here is not clear. Regardless, Jesus is making the point that the master could come at a time that is least expected. This point about the unexpected nature of Christ's return is emphasized using the thief in the night comparison.

Reflections

The content and context of this week's lectionary passage helps us understand that being ready for Christ's return is not merely a question about timing. It is not a matter of simply waiting. We are required to live lives where we live without fear or anxiety for our worldly needs but live lives where we are free to hope and be generous. We are required to live lives where we actively seek to build heavenly treasure rather than worldly rewards. It is only as we build such rhythms and disciplines into our lives that we are ready to participate in the Kingdom and be found awake should Christ return on our watch. As Jesus addressed His disciples in the closing verse of the text, so too He speaks to us, "*You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*"

