

Luke 12:32-40

Jesus promises God's kingdom to those who follow Christ, inviting them to give up temporary, material security and wealth for heavenly security and riches. He encourages them to stay awake and be aware of God's coming.

“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 unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. “Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; 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. 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. If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves. “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. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

Fear. Treasure. Being prepared. We are 3 chapters into the “travel narrative” section of Luke where Jesus has set his sights on Jerusalem, and spends about 10 chapters getting there. Jesus has a lot to say in these chapters, much of it unique to Luke's Gospel. While the passage begins with “Do not fear, little flock,” these words of encouragement might be better heard as the conclusion to Jesus' previous sayings. Jesus has just pointed out the lilies of the field that grow because of God's care, the ravens for which God provides. “Do not fear” is not an out-of-the-blue optimistic statement, but one grounded in the claim that God's faithfulness extends to the entirety of God's creation. It helps us set aside putting our hope in achievements, acquisitions, assets, self-driven determination, self-assessed success, and self-obsessed security. Being ready for Jesus' second coming is less about any actual time and place and more about imagining Jesus' activity in the world, when and where you least expect it or imagine seeing it. In other words, waiting around, waiting for instructions, is not going to cut it. Fear, treasure, and being prepared is the pattern for discipleship. Being without fear, knowing the source of your treasure 0 that is, your identity, your worth - makes it possible to be prepared for and an actual participant in God's kingdom. (Karoline Lewis, adapted)

RCL Readings COCU 51C

Much is made of the promises of God in some circles, but little is said about the ‘cost’ of receiving God's promises. Essentially this cost arises because God's promises are always offered to the community, not just to the individual. And so, Abram is promised innumerable descendants, but must give up his homeland to live among foreigners (as the Hebrews readings explains). In Isaiah's prophecy, God's people can be cleansed and restored, but they must embrace justice and mercy. In the Psalms, God's salvation is offered to those who, like Abram, will trust in God's mercy. Finally, Jesus promises the Kingdom to his followers, but they have to release their faith in human or material resources, and commit to remaining always awake and aware to God's coming – which, if we read the verses following the set section, is strongly linked with how we view and treat others. A great ‘hook’ for this week is the phrase “descendants of Abram”, for Abram's story is the model for the faith we are called to this week – a commitment to trust in God and a willingness to discover & share God's promises of grace and mercy in and with the “other”, the foreigner, the ones who seek justice, the ones we are called to serve.

Global application: There are so many ways that the idea of God's promises and blessings intersect with the realities of our world. When we embrace a view (as so many do) that God's blessings are given primarily to individuals, and that wealth, power and beauty are signs of God's blessing, we will inevitably begin to strive for these “manifestations of blessing” for ourselves. The result, all too often, is that we grow selfish, self-centred, uncommitted to justice, and may even view poverty or suffering as signs of God's judgement. When, however, we realise that God's blessings are always given to communities, and that they are to be shared with the least – that the reality is that we have never really known God's blessing unless it brings justice, mercy and provision to all, especially the poor and weak – our striving becomes sacrificial and generous. We begin to find our place among the “foreigners”, the impoverished and the marginalised, and we discover the richness of God's reign within and among us as we share the blessings that come through us with all. How does this idea of “communal blessing” speak to the distribution of resources in our world? In what way can our commitment to receive God's blessing in this way guide us as we vote, as we participate in civil processes, as we contemplate and petition the meetings of the powerful in our government, in groups like the G8, the G20, and in the United Nations? (John van de Laar, *Sacredise*)

Psalm 50: 1-8, 22-23

God comes in judgement on God's people, inviting them to offer genuine sacrifices of thanksgiving, and promising God's salvation if they will do this.

The mighty one, God the Lord, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.

Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth.

Our God comes and does not keep silence,

before God is a devouring fire, and a mighty tempest all around God. God calls to the heavens above and to the earth, that God may judge God's people: "Gather to me my faithful ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!"

The heavens declare God's righteousness, for God is judge.

"Hear, O my people, and I will speak, O Israel, I will testify against you. I am God, your God. Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you; your burnt offerings are continually before me. Mark this, then, you who forget God, or I will tear you apart, and there will be no one to deliver.

Those who bring thanksgiving as their sacrifice honour me; to those who go the right way I will show the salvation of God."

Isaiah 1:1-20

Isaiah prophesies against God's people, expressing God's displeasure at their worship and sacrifices while injustice remains among them. God invites the people to repent and confess, and if they do, God promises to cleanse and restore them.

The vision of Isaiah son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom! Listen to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah! What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. When you come to appear before me, who asked this from your hand?

Trample my courts no more; bringing offerings is futile; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and sabbath and calling of convocation - I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity. Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them. When you stretch out your

hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.

Come now, let us argue it out, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

Abraham is an example of faith, giving up his homeland and living as a foreigner in a strange land for the sake of a God-given inheritance.

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old - and Sarah herself was barren - because he considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, "as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore."

All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.