

Year C -- August 11, 2019  
9 Pentecost (Proper 14)  
Christ Church Mexia

Charles Dickens, Stephen King or O. Henry could have written the tenth, eleventh and twelfth chapters of Luke. They all have something in common with Dr. Luke as he tells of the events surrounding three of Jesus' parables.

Jesus' parables appear at first to be innocent stories using commonplace events to make an obvious point, but then they suddenly take an unexpected turn at the end. The first parable is in Luke 10, the story of the Good Samaritan. Last week, we had the parable of the rich fool. And then today, we have the account of the watchful servants.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the expected thing to happen would have been for the Samaritan to keep on walking since the Samaritans and the Jews were bitter enemies. But, it was the priest and the Levite that walked on past the injured man. It is a Samaritan who proves to be a neighbor to the wounded man, an unexpected turn of events.

Then Jesus told the parable of the rich fool who had an accumulation of goods. But God said to him, "tonight your soul is required of you." The farmer's wealth should have provided him a comfortable living for a long time, but the farmer dies and leaves all of this wealth for the family to divide.

Today, Jesus introduces us to an assembly of servants. You would expect that when their master got home, the servants would wait on him but, in the parable, the master has "them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them." (Luke 12:37)

But what is Christ trying to get across to us in these stories? Christ is actually trying to get a couple of interrelated points over to us.

Notice verse 33. It begins with the command: "sell your possessions, and give alms..." We talked last week about the concept behind "sell your possessions" – the idea of not letting our possession control us, but rather, we control them. We manage them to the point that if we felt the need, we would be ready and able to get rid of all or part of our

possessions for a higher mission. Today, Jesus adds another element to the command. He says we are to be in control of our belongings to the point that we can give to the needy around us. This verse is rich in connotations that are hidden. We will look at just one today, the word “alms.” The Greek word is ἐλεημοσύνη. We translate the word as “give alms.”. In other places, scholars translate it as “give to the needy.”

If you study that word, one of the first thing that you see that isn't apparent in English is that the people we are to give to are not asking for anything. They are not begging. Why should we give to these people if they don't ask? Looking back at the original word, we see that it is made up of parts of two different words. The first part of the word is usually translated as “mercy.” It is a powerful word and is used three ways in the Bible.

First, it is mercy shown by one person to another. The word “mercy” denotes compassion and love, not just feelings or emotions. In his book, *The Only Way to Happiness*, John MacArthur is talking about mercy, and he says

“Mercy is seeing a man without food and giving him food. Mercy is seeing a person begging for love and giving him love. Mercy is seeing someone lonely and giving him company. Mercy is *meeting* the need, not just feeling it.”

Secondly, it is used as God giving mercy to His people in salvation; it is the mercy of God in providing salvation through Christ. Our acts of charity and compassion are to be done for the same reason that God sent Jesus Christ. God did not wait for His people to ask before He sent His son. God sent Jesus long before we knew we needed a way to deal with our wrong deeds. God acted first. And, we are to give that type of mercy to the people around us. We are not to wait until someone asks us for help. When we see a need, we should act first. We should be the “savior” in that situation. Our desire to help someone else should be so strong and deep that we see the need before they ask, and we act. But there is one final meaning to the word.

The word also refers to the mercy that Jesus will give at His return, the mercy that He will use in His judgment of you and me. This is the word that reveals the yardstick that Jesus will use when He looks at our gifts and charity; not at the gifts themselves but the motivation behind the giving. Why do we give? Jesus will judge our motivations.

I want to go back to the original word for just a moment. There is another shade of meaning in this word that isn't obvious. And that is the teaching of the concept of tithing.

When I hear people talk about tithing, I hear phrases like, "the church has enough money," "we can pay our bills, we don't need to ask for more money," and other statements along that line. The problem is that all of these statements are about money. But tithing isn't about the use of money.

The word translated "alms" here is the word that is used for the giving of money and gifts as a tithe. The word is used 14 times in the Bible. However, the word conveys giving money to the church or synagogue only five times. A majority of times the word is used, it refers to giving to one another. It talks about my giving to some person in need. And it isn't just money; it is also time, attention, materials, talents, resources, ideas, all those things that I have control of. You see, the concept of tithing is about why you give not where you give. That is why God promises to bless the giver. God is not a banker. He does not pay interest on our gifts. But He does reward our motivation. In Matthew 23:23, we find a very familiar scripture, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! – for you tithe mint and dill and cummin, (*possessions, money*) and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; (*motivations*) these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others." God is talking about why we give, not what. The first person in the Bible to pay tithes, Abraham, paid his tithe to an itinerant preacher, not to an organization. (Genesis 14:20)

So what should we learn about tithing from this? It is not about an obligatory debt we pay to the church. It is about using our resources for the good of people and to do it out of mercy and love. It is not about how charitable you are but why. That is why it is easy for us to be a cheerful giver (II Corinthians 9:7). Doesn't the Bible say that "God loves

a cheerful giver.” Want to know a little secret? That verse doesn’t say God loves a cheerful giver but that God loves a hilarious giver. That is why I can be happy giving of myself because I am giving to someone, something that I believe in and love. If that is a church, give everything to the church. But if you have a choice of grudgingly giving to a church or happily giving to a family you know whose home burned, which do you think God would want? Personally, I know many people who split their gifts between their church and other activities that help spiritually.

That is Jesus’ point – we should be giving, but giving for the right reason. The second thing that Jesus is trying to get across is in the parable of the watchful servants. In the story, Jesus uses two groups of people. The first group was the servants that were ready for the master’s return. They didn’t know when he would return, but they were ready. When he did return, they welcomed him, but the master came in and had a banquet for them. They were rewarded for their readiness.

The second group was the people who were not ready. That is what is told to us in the little snippet about the thief coming in the night. The master was gone, and they didn’t know when he would return. So, they just went to sleep. As a result of their inactivity, the thief broke in and stole the master’s possessions. Their unreadiness cost the master all that he had. So Jesus tells us the being ready has its rewards, and not being ready has its consequences. But how are we to be ready? How will people know that we are ready?

Jesus tells us that being ready results in us doing the things we have been shown to do – feeding the poor, showing mercy to the needy, giving of ourselves. This is how we are to be ready — but ready for what? The return of Christ? Maybe. But more likely we are ready for the opportunities that come along that we can use to add to our bank account in the First Citizens Bank of Heaven. The last part of verse 33 tells us that we should be “making purses” for ourselves, making places where our rewards are on deposit, waiting for us. And when can we use those deposits? Excuse me if I pull out the Greek one last time. In verse 32, it says “for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” The interesting thing is that verse is in the past tense. The

Father has already given us the Kingdom. We possess it right now. It is ours to benefit from in our daily life. Now! We can use it for the blessings that God sends our way. Use it for the security that He offers us in our everyday life. Use it to discover that our money seems to go a little further than it used to. We make a withdrawal from your account every time a child looks at you as you hand them a Christmas or birthday gift. You can add to your blessings by being at Mexia High School passing out school supplies to students in need of help. And, it is there to comfort us at the end with a sense of peace at our home going. Those are the blessings of being ready. And they are there right now for those who are ready.

In the name of the One God, Father, Sustainer, and Comforter.

*Amen*

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### **Luke 12:32-40**

- 32** Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.
- 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.
- 34** For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
- 35** Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit;
- 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.
- 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.
- 38** If 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.
- 40** You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.'