



What Pleases God – Touchpoint for August 3, 2022

Luke 12:32-40 (NRSVUE) 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.

Watchful Slaves 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.”

Grace and Peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

“It is your Father’s good pleasure to GIVE you the kingdom” ... and... “He will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them.”

God’s good pleasure.

Is that how you were brought up to think about God? God finding good pleasure in humanity and earthly things... God coming to us in a pleasing way. Is that how God is portrayed by populist American Christianity these days? A God who is pleased with us and in dealing with us?

Somehow I don’t remember Jonathan Edwards ever giving a famous sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of a God who is Pleased.”

And not only is giving us the kingdom pleasing to God, God wants to serve it to us. Hand it to us on a platter.

“He will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them.”

Wait, don’t we have to work for it? Don’t we have to prepare and repent, submit and humble ourselves?

“Truly I tell you, he (the master) will fasten his belt and have them (the servants) sit down and eat, and he will come and serve them.”

Ok, if you insist God. I will submit to being served. It seems too good to be true. Yet, here it is.

So how can a master who comes to serve be equated to a thief in the night? What could a master who serves us possibly be stealing from us?

Well, other than our desire to earn that service from the master.

“It is your Father’s good pleasure to GIVE you the kingdom.”

As wonderful as grace is... we must first admit... it steals.

It steals our desire to be in control. It steals our longing for 'free will.' It steals our desire to be 'god-like' and the final arbiter of good and evil.

It simply takes everything out of our hands.

And once it has been taken away... it can be given back... as a gift.

You see, once the kingdom has been given to us... there is no such thing as 'my possessions.'

The only thing I can go and sell is what has always been given to me. When everything is seen as a gift from God, 'my possessions' is a contradiction, an oxymoron. Or maybe it's a falsehood redundancy, because there is no more 'my' and there are no more 'possessions.'

Matt Skinner, a professor of New Testament theology at Luther Seminary, writes this:

"According to Jesus, "almsgiving" involves more than charity in a condescending or transactional way... in which the wealthy half, give their excesses to the poorer half. Almsgiving is an expression of true solidarity with others. This is a solidarity that refuses to let inequalities stand, even if kind people might try to soften the razor-sharp edges of our economic inequalities with their regular generosity..."

In other words, Jesus calls for a shift away from a world in which some people survive only because more privileged people choose to act morally from time to time. He has in mind, a different world – or 'kingdom' – that entails the destruction of old categories and demarcations. Almsgiving isn't about offerings that 'help' those with less money; it must be about sharing power and advantage."

So you see, it is God's good pleasure to give us the kingdom – the problem is we don't necessarily want it. Especially after we have spent our entire lives building up our own kingdoms. And anything that intrudes on our kingdoms, anything that threatens our kingdoms, anything that might take away from our kingdoms... is like a thief in the night.

Sheri Brown, one of my favorite writers and theologians, gives insight into this when writing on Luke 12:13-21:

"Rich people, like me, get to indulge in luxury. We especially like to indulge in the luxury of anticipatory loss, filling our days with thoughts of what the future might lack... Having so much to lose, we indulge in worry that what we have won't last long enough. We indulge in fear that someone will take it away. We indulge in leaders who cultivate our worries and harvest our fears."

It's not REAL worry and fear, of course, not the present day worry and pressing fear suffered by those who are hungry and homeless and in danger. It's indulgence, indulgence in the luxury of self-protection, self-preservation."

Or as Jesus might say: *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

And so there is a thief-y quality to the kingdom. It does take away. It does destroy the old categories and demarcations. It even destroys the luxury of self-indulgent worry... which we have built our life and culture on.

But that is not something to fear – *"Do not be afraid little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."*

The thief doesn't leave us empty handed. We are given a new way of living. A new kingdom. One that pleases God much more than the one we are living in now.

It's a different kind of security. Based not on what we have or can possess, but based on the giver of all life.

Let's face it, it isn't just our purses that wear out. We wear out. And when we see ourselves as the ultimate purse in which everything we have must be poured into, then all others and all things become either thieves or moths that seek to take away or destroy us.

But when our security is based on the author and giver of life, others are not thieves or moths. They are my brothers and sisters from the Heavenly Giver. And the very purse we see ourselves as being becomes not a place of hoarding and protection, but a source of giving – ‘an *unfailing treasure*’ of the Kingdom.

I wonder if a better translation of what Jesus is trying to get at would be: **“Make purses OF yourselves that do not wear out,”** rather than **“make purses FOR yourselves.”**

That is what this meal is all about, isn't it? This Jesus, who saw the purse that was his life as a source of giving, not as a place of hoarding and protection.

“This is my body, GIVEN for you. This is my blood, Poured out for you.”

Even in the night in which he was betrayed, it was the Father's “good pleasure” to give his kingdom to us.

EVEN IN THE NIGHT HE WAS BETRAYED, *“He will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them.”* And according to John's gospel, even wash their feet first.

Talk about coming at an unexpected hour.

In the night of betrayal and denial. In the days of fear and doubt. This is when the Son of Man comes and the Father is pleased to give us his Kingdom.

I want to conclude with some more words from Sheri Brown. I'm going to paraphrase a little, but I think still stay true to what she wrote, and yet put it into the context of today's bible passage:

My God, my God – how possessed I have become by my possessions. How consumed I am by my earthly treasures, how addicted I am to all kinds of greed.

Teacher, teach me to be on guard. Teacher, tell me one more time about the Father's kingdom. Reveal the holy ground in which I live and move and have my being. Raise me up as an adopted heir of God and God's kingdom. Renew in me your gift of abundant life. This revelation of being, this belonging, this life in Christ ... that's the Father's kingdom for all of us.

There's nothing to divide. It's not divisible. There's nothing to hoard. It's not storable. So let's wear our Christ selves everywhere, pouring out all the Kingdom's treasures, lavishly spending all of God's riches, extravagantly loving all our brothers and sisters, being outrageously rich to the One who enriches us.

Go ahead and spend the Kingdom's treasure – all of it – everyday. There's always more where it came from. Thanks be to God who abundantly produces all being and all belonging, and all life.

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taize Choir, Remember Me)

Be Still, know that I am God

Hearken to My Voice

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Hearken to my voice, O Lord when I call. Have mercy on me and answer me.
You speak in my heart, and say, "Seek my face." Your face, Lord will I seek.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Come O Lord and Set Us Free

(John L. Bell, The Wild Goose Collection)

Come, O Lord and set us free. Give/Bring your people peace.

Come, O Lord and set us free. Come Lord Jesus, Come.

1. And take our guilt away. Give us your pardon Lord.
2. Free from our self-obsession. Free from each fond possession.
3. Free to affirm each other...as sister and as brother

Reshape the world you made. Let what your hand created...be always celebrated.

The Meal

Lord's Prayer

(The Scottish Festival Singers)

Benediction

A Blessing

(Margaret Rizza, Kevin Mayhew Ltd. Complete Chants Vol.1)

May the Lord bless you.

May the Lord protect you and guide you.

May His strength uphold you.

His light shine upon you.

His peace surround you.

His love enfold you.

May the Lord bless you.