

Isaiah 1:1, 10-20

Psalms 50:1-8, 23-24

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

Luke 12:32-40

– appreciate the preaching here at Christ Church because we don't shy away from tough topics. I decided to take that as a compliment but it's really not about us, it's not what we're saying. We're just reading the gospel here.

And it is a good reminder though that I think our faith, and our practices, they can get a little rote. They can get a little stale. We can get a little complacent. And we can forget that being a Christian is supposed to be challenging. It's supposed to be life-changing. Because the gospel isn't here to bless the way that we have decided to organize our lives, it's supposed to upend it – to disrupt our priorities, our plans, and our need for control. And not because God wants to mess with us, because God wants to invite us into a life that is truly worth living.

So yeah, the gospel does challenge us with tough questions. But I think we can relax today because I didn't really see anything like that in today's gospel. Did you? There's that one part where Jesus says, "Sell your possessions and give alms." Sell your stuff and give the proceeds to the poor, hmm, okay. Well, there's that. And if you're a little taken aback by that you're not alone. In fact, the very first question that the disciples ask Jesus after hearing this gospel – we didn't hear it because the lesson cuts off. But the very first thing they say to him is, "Okay now, who's this for? Is this for us? Is this for everybody?"

And it's an interesting reaction because this is not the first time Jesus has talked about selling your stuff. If you recall back in Chapter 10 in Luke, the story of the rich, young ruler – remember that one? That's the one where the wealthy character comes to Jesus and he says, "You know, I've been keeping all of the commandments since I was a boy. I'm a good person. I try to do the right thing. But I'm just wondering, is there anything more I need to do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus says, "Yeah, one more thing; sell your possessions, give the proceeds to the poor and follow me."

And like the disciples, I think it's easy to hear those kind of stories and think, "That's certainly referring to someone else – I'm not rich after all." We can always point to someone else who has more, can't we?

But the reality is if you made \$34,000 last year, you're in the top one percent of the world's income earners. And I know you might be saying, "Well yeah, but that \$34,000, that doesn't go too far. We have a higher cost of living here." Yeah, that's true but again, if you have a roof over your head, if you have food on the table in the morning, if you have a bed to sleep in at night, if you have clean water to drink, and transportation when you need it, you're doing better than 92 percent of the rest of the world.

Last Sunday, we heard about the greedy landowner, the one who had these huge surpluses so he's building bigger and bigger barns to store it all because it never occurs to him that he might share it. And again, it's easy to hear that story and go, "Well, that's not me. That was

a Gordon Gecko type, as pastor Manisha suggested.” But did you know the average American home hasn’t doubled in size, it’s actually tripled in the last 60 years. And yet, somehow, Americans still can’t seem to fit both of their cars in the garage.

And you remember, a couple of years ago, there was that huge recession, right? The big one in the late 2000s, and millions of people were being thrown out of work. The real estate industry, the real estate market had just crashed. And what was the growth industry? Self-storage units were booming.

And my favorite of these, is a 10-year-old kid, the average 10-year-old in America has 250 toys, yet plays with only five percent of them. You’re not a – and [inaudible 05:10] to go by, that 10-year-old has nothing on two-year-old girls, let me tell you. He’s a minimalist by comparison.

So the point is, when Jesus talks tough about money or our possessions and asks challenging questions, it’s easy to start parsing. It’s easy to look for some exception, or some interpretation that would help us to point a finger at someone else. But the truth is, these are teachings for all of us. So what are we to make of it? Is selling our possessions a literal requirement to be Christian? Should we be pooling our resources together and living in a commune? Or is it just a metaphor?

Or maybe Jesus is just doing some hyperbole here. Some have tried to parse the words and they say, “Well, you know He doesn’t say, ‘all possessions,’ He just says, ‘possessions.’ Maybe we can keep the stuff we really want.”

For my part, I hear this teaching, “Give up our possessions,” not as a metaphor but also not as a literal rule. I hear it as Jesus being aspirational. In the same way that the Great Commandments is aspirational, to love God with all our hearts – every last corner of it – and to love our neighbor, the stranger, the other, the one who scares us, the one who’s different from us, to love them as ourselves.

I hear Jesus casting a vision for what we should be shooting for; a life totally given to God, and to love of others. A life where all that we are and all that we have has been placed into the service of the Kingdom.

And I also hear God warning us that if we spend our life pursuing possessions – and all the anxieties and stress that goes along with it – that they eventually own us. And then if we put our treasure, and our energies, and our time into things that without realizing it, our hearts will go there too. And without knowing it, we may miss out entirely on God’s heart for us.

I also don’t hear Jesus trying to make us anxious with this gospel. Jesus says, “My little flock, have no fear, it is God’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” He’s not trying to make us miserable, or make us poor, or make us miss out. He’s trying to give us something far better. He’s trying to give us the pearl of the greatest price. And I don’t hear Him scolding us about creature comfort so much as I hear Him admonishing us to put them in their place, to never put our trust in them so that we might receive the greatest comfort of all.

And finally, I hear Jesus telling us to be ready, be ready for those moments like Abraham and Sarai, when we were called out on a new journey. One where we may have no idea where we are going, and no idea if we will ever arrive but will nonetheless take us to places we can only imagine, into a heavenly country where we can discover a new purpose, and a new sense of identity and a new trust in God.

And I've heard some preachers say, "Well, you know this kind of radical life of self-giving, that may not be something we're all called to. Maybe it's something for monastics, or aesthetics." But I disagree. As followers of Jesus, we are all called to a life of ever more self-giving, ever more self-emptying love. And it is a journey that is never finished. It is never complete. We never fully arrive.

Yet somehow it's the journey that fills us with the assurance of all things hoped for, and a renewed conviction for the kingdom not yet seen. So yeah, be dressed, keep the lamps lit, be ready. Because we don't know the hour that Jesus will come. And by the way, do not hear that as a threat. Jesus was just trying to wake us up and remind us that the journey into the kingdom of God has already begun. The train has left the station. So be ready to hop aboard when it comes your way.

Wake up each morning and ask God, "Show me how I might give more of myself away today. What part of my life do I need to part with so that I might be ready?" Be like a professional athlete or an accomplished musician who never stops training. We too need to be in a continual stance, a constant posture of discernment and prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to show us how we are called to give next.

We recently hosted a blessing at our house. And if you didn't know what a blessing of a home means, it means that you're setting something apart for God, and for God's purposes, and for God's kingdom. And Jo and I, ever since have been in discernment about what does it mean for our biggest possession? How might we be called to put our home to work building the Kingdom of God?

And I have long had a passion for the plight of homeless; I couldn't help but notice we have an extra bedroom that's not really being used. And this idea had actually been in our hearts for some time. I even preached about it a couple of months ago. So I decided to call the Ruth Ellis Center. That's a day center for homeless LGBT youth – kids who have been rejected by their own families, not for anything that they've ever done but just for who they are. And I called them and I said, "You know, we have an extra bedroom. Might you have a client who needs a place to stay?"

I have to say I was a little concerned. I thought maybe they might think I was crazy. But as the Holy Spirit would have it, it just so happens they had been looking for volunteers to pilot just such a program.

So here we go, assuming we place someone in our house in the next few months we will begin a whole new journey. One where we have no idea where it will go, and no idea how it will work out. We know only that we heard Jesus knocking on our door. And He came in the form of a homeless teen. And as disrupting as it might be to our house, it felt like it's the next right thing for us.

What might be the next right thing for you? What new way of giving is God calling you to try on? Who does your heart break for? What do you have that could be set apart for the Kingdom of God?

Jesus preached about giving as much as he has, as much as he did, because at the end of the day, giving is how we let go to our hold on this world so that we might build a new one. What do you need to let go of so when the kingdom comes knocking, you will be ready?

Amen.

[End of Recording]