Season After Pentecost (June 16-November 24)

On the Road with Jesus


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Bible Background

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”
Luke 12:32

Feeling anxious and being scared is very much a part of our human existence. Even though scripture tells us to “fear not” and “don’t be afraid,” we do fear and we are afraid. It’s only natural. In today’s passage, we find words of comfort and also words of challenge.

Opening

Begin your lesson with everyone in the large group. On the board write, “What do you worry about?”

Then, ask the group to list the things they worry about. What they share could be small, seemingly insignificant worries or those big worries that rob us of sleep and peace.

Write everything down. Then, ask everyone to turn to a partner so they can discuss how they handle the things they worry about. What does each person do to cope with anxiety and worrying?

After a few minutes of discussion, open the floor for large group conversation. Ask questions like these to keep your group talking:

Why do you think worrying is so much a part of our daily routine?

Knowing that worry is with us, do you think it matters if what we worry about is “big” or “small?” Or, is worry, just worry?

What are healthy ways we can cope with worrying and anxiety? What are unhealthy ways?

Where is God in our anxieties? What can we learn about God and ourselves in times of worry?
**Reading the Bible**

Who is not to be afraid? (little flock)

What will be given? (the kingdom)

What are they to do? (Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out)

Where is it safe from thieves and moths? (heaven)

Where are your treasure and heart? (together)

For what should you be dressed? (action)

How should we 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)

What will the master do for the slaves alert for his return? (have them sit down to eat and he will serve them)

What would the owner of the house do if he knew when the thief was coming? (not let his house be broken into)

What are we to do and why? (be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour)

**Making Connections**

Our passage uses the image of Jesus as shepherd. What is your image, or metaphor, of Jesus? What does your image reveal about the nature of Jesus for you?

How would you respond if your pastor, or highly respected religious leader, sat in your living room, looked you in the eye, and with all seriousness said, “The best thing you can do for the kingdom and for yourself is to sell your possessions.” How would you respond to that declaration? Why do you respond that way?

What do you think is Jesus’ position on “all our stuff?” How did you come to that understanding?

Jesus calls us to be alert and ready. For what do you think we need to be alert and ready? What are you doing to prepare? Are your preparations enough?

What do you do to protect your house and possessions? What do you do to protect your heart and beliefs? Where do you find similarities? Where do you find difference?

Our Lesson Writer states, “Abundant life is not found in preserving our possessions, but in serving the one who gave us life.” How can we serve the one who gave us life?
So What?

Give each person a piece of paper and a pen. Ask everyone to think about their typical monthly spending habits. Have them make a list of what they spend and where they spend it. The accounting doesn’t have to be exact.

Our passage clearly states, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

What does your spending say about your heart?

What does your spending reveal about your preparation for the kingdom?

What does your spending show you about your discipleship to Jesus?

As a large group, open discussion for this sensitive topic.

How can we, as people caught in-between the desire to follow Jesus and the desire to buy/get stuff, get our hearts right with our treasure?

Spend time talking about this, focusing not only on the logistics or how we do it, but also on the worry and anxiety this topic brings into our lives.

If we have so much stuff, what does that say about our faith journey and commitment to Jesus?

If we want a new car, does that make us a bad Christian?

If we give away all our stuff and live minimally, does that make us a great Christian?

The Challenge

This week, as you spend your money, think about where you money goes and make one step toward using what you have for the kingdom of God. Make that step a weekly habit.

Prayer

_Loving God, you tell us not to worry. You tell us to “fear not.” We hear those words, but we still struggle. Help us to trust you with all of who we are and with all of what we have. You know our hearts and you love us. Align our hearts and desires with your heart and desires. For the sake of your kingdom. Amen._
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Same stories, different settings—The material in Luke 12:32–34, which follows a section on not being anxious (vv. 22–31 = Matt. 6:25–33), appears in Matthew as part of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:19–21). The following section, a warning to be prepared and faithful (vv. 35–48), is found in the conclusion of Matthew’s “Little Apocalypse” (Matt. 24:43–51).

Little flock—Old Testament images of God as a shepherd and Israel as God’s flock are frequent. They include comforting texts such as Psalm 23, and prophetic texts such as Jer. 13:37, Ezekiel 34, Zech. 10:3, among others.

The “littleness” of the flock may reflect the prophetic idea that God would raise up a remnant (Isa. 10:20–22, 11:11, 37:31–32; Jer. 23:3; Amos 5:15; Mic. 4:7, 5:7–8), or to the small number of those who had truly committed themselves to following Jesus.

The less we need—Consider this quotation, from Audrey West: “The less we want to have, the less we need to have. This fact is itself one of the blessings God offers, with compound interest. The less we need to have, the less we need to fear. The less we need to fear, the more we know that a life of giving allows us always to live, not on the brink of destruction, but on the brink of blessing, where we can more readily hear the promise that the ‘Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour,’ desiring not to punish but to bless. (Feasting on the Word, Year C, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, vol. 3 of Accordance electronic ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), paragraph 17277.)

How do you respond to these thoughts?

Slaves and servants—Some translations use the term “servants” rather than “slaves” in vv. 35–38, perhaps to be more palatable. Still, we should recognize that there were not hired servants, but slaves: the word used is doulos, the common Greek word for a slave who was considered someone else’s personal property.

When the master turns the tables and serves the staff, he does not switch roles entirely: the word used for “serve” is not from doulos, but is diakonēsei, from the verb meaning “to serve” that gives us the word “deacon.”
Does Jesus really expect us to sell everything and give it to the poor?

How do we understand Jesus’ comment that recipients of the kingdom should sell their possessions and give to the poor? Was it meant only for the disciples? Was it meant to be taken literally? Would Jesus have us all be homeless?

In context, Jesus appears to have been addressing his disciples, not just the twelve, but also others who were committed to following him, including a number of women who provided financial and other support. The crowds included curious and uncommitted folk seeking to overhear the conversation.

Jesus appears to have called his initial disciples to leave everything and follow him, though we presume their possessions remained with their families.

When the “rich young ruler” asked Jesus what he needed to do to inherit eternal life, Jesus recognized where the man’s true allegiance lay: he told him to sell his possessions, give the money to the poor, and follow him (Mat. 19:21).

Stories of Jesus sending out disciples on mission (Matt. 10:5-15; Mark 6:7-13; Luke 9:1-6, 10:1-12) have him instructing them not to take bread, a bag, or money, but to trust that others would provide for them. Following the Lord’s Supper, however, Luke has Jesus say “When I sent you out without a purse, bag, or sandals, did you lack anything?” They said, “No, not a thing.” He said to them, “But now, the one who has a purse must take it, and likewise a bag. And the one who has no sword must sell his cloak and buy one” (Luke 22:35-36). While the meaning of that is obscure, it suggests different needs for different times.

Members of the early church in Jerusalem were known for sharing their goods, selling possessions as needed for the good of the community (Acts 4:32). But this apparently left them in such poverty that during a time of famine, Paul later took up an offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8:1-9:15; Rom. 15:14-32).

There were clearly situations in which Jesus called for people to be willing to give up everything else in order to follow him. But Jesus also stayed at Peter’s house while in Capernaum and enjoyed the hospitality of friends like Mary and Martha without instructing them to sell their homes or empty their pantries.

Paul worked for a living while leading many people to have faith in Christ, and some of them made their homes available for churches to meet there. He accepted their hospitality and encouraged believers to be generous but did not ask them to liquidate their assets and become impoverished.
The Hardest Question continued

So, what does Jesus intend us to do? Is this only hyperbole? Perhaps the point is that he wants us to trust him so much that, if called to do so, we could get rid of all our stuff and still have peace, knowing that we live in God’s kingdom care.