

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, 12th Sunday After Pentecost, August 7, 2016

What Are Your Expectations?

Dr. Kenneth Humphreys

August 7, 2016

Luke 12:32-40

Expectations --- What are they? What does this word mean? Webster's Dictionary defines them as "*A belief that something will happen; a feeling or belief about how successful, good, etc. someone or something will be.*"

More often than not, expectations are of something good, something beneficial, something we desire but they can also be negative things, things we fear, things we dread.

Our scripture reading this morning from Luke is all about expectations --- positive ones, positive that is if we prepare for them properly.

The reading tells us to expect God's kingdom and to prepare for it. That certainly is something good but then it tells us to sell our possessions and give the proceeds to the poor. Whoa! Wait a minute! Sell everything we have and give it away! OK, the poor need a lot. Their expectations are not high --- but give everything I have to the poor! How can I afford to do that? If I do that, I will become just as poor as they are! What kind of a scriptural message is that? It doesn't make sense --- or does it?

Read further in our scripture today. It promises that if we do provide for the poor, we will receive even greater treasure in heaven. That is a totally different view. Our earthly treasures become insignificant in comparison to heavenly treasure.

But don't confuse earthly treasure with heavenly treasure.

Does the scripture really mean that we should give everything we have to the poor? No, not really. We still need the necessities of life but some people, such as Mahatma Gandhi did give everything to the poor. He did exactly that and managed quite well. What the scripture means is that we should stop our preoccupation with material things and that we should instead be concerned with spiritual things. God will take care of us if we take care of others who need our help.

This is just another expression of Jesus' second commandment to love your neighbor as yourself.

Take care of yourself and your family but take care of others who need your help. In Greek mythology we find a ruler named King Midas. You most likely have read stories about him. There actually were three real kings named Midas. In the Greek mythology everything King Midas touched, whichever King Midas he was, into gold.

He rejoiced in his power to do this and of course became incredibly wealthy, but he had a problem --- a very big problem. When touched, everything and everyone turned into solid gold. Wealth was everything to him but he couldn't eat. His food turned to gold. He lost his family because they turned to solid gold when he touched them. His wealth, his Midas touch, which had been a great blessing in his eyes, became a curse. It was destroying him and he literally was starving to death until he began to pray to be relieved of his affliction. His prayers were answered with a message to wash in the river Pactolus. He did and the Midas touch went away. Further, anything that he previously touched, when immersed in the river, was restored.

In our materialistic society, all too many people strive for the Midas touch. They seek more and more wealth and few of them use that wealth for the benefit of others.

Athletes have multi-million dollar contracts and each year want even bigger contracts. Their greed runs rampant.

If any of you own any stocks, look carefully at the annual reports of these companies and the proxy statements you receive with the annual reports. They always ask you to vote in favor of their executive compensation plan. Did you ever read the fine print? Most of these executives and board members receive obscene levels of compensation, and even when companies are losing money, you are asked to approve substantial executive pay increases so that the company can "remain competitive" with other companies and be able to attract top board members and executives.

On the surface, that seems to make sense but if every company raises executive salaries by huge amounts each year in order to "remain competitive", the escalation never ends. They are asking their stockholders to give them the Midas touch. Their employees rarely, if ever, receive raises of anywhere near the magnitude of those received by the corporate officers, if the employees receive anything at all. In recent years, employee pay raises have generally been insignificant or non-existent.

As I was writing this message, I looked at the proxy statement of one major company. The key officers of that company were each being paid in excess of \$4 million

per year. That was a lot but when stock awards and other forms of bonus compensation were added, the CEO received over \$18 million, and sizeable increases were being asked for all of their officers, but not their employees.

The poor in this illustration included the employees of this Fortune 500 firm. The rank and file employees were not being fairly treated by comparison, not at all. The officers' expectations were for more and more. The employees did not expect much of anything, and a trivial portion of the company's earnings went to them, to charitable purposes and to help the needy.

Is this company an exception? No, it is not! It is the rule, not the exception, and in fact their compensation policies are not as abusive as those of many other companies in the Fortune 500.

Luke 12:34 says, *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* That is where the hearts of the executives of most major companies apparently lie.

There are exceptions of course, companies like Microsoft and its founder Bill Gates are very socially concerned, treat their employees fairly, and give billions to the needy. Warren Buffett and Berkshire Hathaway do the same.

Our scripture reading tells us to be ready, *"... because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."* He will come to give us the kingdom of God.

Will he give it to the executives of many major corporations? They probably expect it but they may not receive it. I am sure that Christ wants these companies to be socially responsible. Hopefully they will learn to do so.

Similarly Jesus expects us to be socially responsible, but are we as socially responsible as we should be? Do we do all that we can afford to do to use our possessions to help those in need and to support the work of the church? Is your heart in the right place?

I can't answer that question for you. Only you know its answer. *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

What are your expectations?

Amen.

Note: Scripture quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible, 2011

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What Are Your Expectations?

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Luke 12:32-40

Liturgical color – green

**This is the day the Lord has made.
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

Announcements

One: The peace of Christ be with you.

Many: And also with you.

Call to Worship (Responsive)

The heavens declare the righteousness of God.

The earth declares God's beauty.

From the rising of the sun to its setting

God's word shines forth in glory.

Let us worship God!

*Opening Hymn "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah" #281

Opening Prayer

O God of promise, creator of the cosmos,
you are the first light breaking through the void,
and the final light we shall eternally enjoy.

Keep our hearts ever vigilant
as we wait to welcome you,
that you would find us clothed in love,
dressed for action, and eager to receive you. **Amen.**

Prayer Response Inside front cover of hymnal – In Unison

*Hear Our Prayer, O Lord, Hear Our Prayer, O Lord, Incline Thine ear to us, And grant us Thy peace. **Amen.***

Psalm of Praise Psalm 50:1-6 (Responsive). Pew Bible page 886.

Please read the even numbered verses responsively.

¹ The Mighty One, God, the LORD,
speaks and summons the earth
from the rising of the sun to where it sets.

² **From Zion, perfect in beauty,
God shines forth.**

³ Our God comes
and will not be silent;
a fire devours before him,
and around him a tempest rages.

⁴ **He summons the heavens above,
and the earth, that he may judge his people:**

⁵ “Gather to me this consecrated people,
who made a covenant with me by sacrifice.”

⁶ **And the heavens proclaim his righteousness,
for he is a God of justice.**

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Call to Confession

[spoken from the font]

My brothers and sisters, remember that God loves us;
therefore by the mercy of God,
let us cease to do evil and learn to do good.

Trusting in God's mercy,
let us confess our sin before God and one another.

Prayer of Confession (Unison)

**Holy God, you call us to do good,
seek justice, and care for those in need,
yet how often we place our own comforts
above compassion for others.
Forgive us, we pray,
and cleanse us from these and all our offenses
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Assurance of God's Pardon

Hear the good news!
[Water is poured into the font, visibly and audibly.]
God is merciful and kind;
though our sins are like scarlet,
they become like snow.
Be at peace,
for your sins are washed clean by the goodness
of God.

*Gloria Patri #579– In Unison

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the
beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen*

Children's' Message

Prayer for Illumination

God of Hope,
by faith we know that you created the world,
and that what is seen is made by things that are not visible.
Open our eyes to your presence among us
that we may hear your word with clarity and a sureness of hope,
as we follow you in all righteousness.
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

Gospel Reading Luke 12:32-40 --- Pew Bible page 1620

Listen for the Word of the Lord from the Gospel according to Luke:

³² “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ³⁵ “Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, ³⁶ like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. ³⁷ It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. ³⁸ It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or toward daybreak. ³⁹ But understand 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, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

*Congregational Hymn “The God of Abraham Praise” #488

Sermon “**What Are Your Expectations?**” Dr. Kenneth Humphreys

Anthem "Nearer My God to Thee", Mormon Tabernacle Choir (© 1992 Sony Music Entertainment Inc. Used by Permission. CCLI License 11224027) (CD 1, Tr. 20)

**Affirmation of Faith From the PC (U.S.A.) Declaration of Faith. (Unison)*

The Spirit is one with the Father and the Son.

In the presence of the Holy Spirit

**the first Christians experienced God's own presence,
not a power different from God or less than God.**

**In Jesus Christ they met God himself,
not a second God or one who is only like God.**

**Yet they worshiped with the people of Israel
one God alone.**

Reflecting on this mystery,

the ancient church formulated the doctrine of the Trinity.

**We believe with the church through the centuries
that God is what he has shown himself to be
in his story with his people:**

**One God who is the Creator and Sustainer,
the Savior and Lord,**

the Giver of life within, among, and beyond us.

We affirm the unity of God's being and work.

**We may not separate the work of God as Creator
from the work of God as Redeemer.**

We may not set the Son's love against the Father's justice.

**We may not value the Holy Spirit's work
above the work of the Father and Son.**

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one God.

We affirm richness and variety in God's being and work.

We may not deny the real distinctions in God's unity.

**In his eternal being and in all his activity,
the one God is always and at the same time
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.**

Tithes and Offerings

Jesus said, "Sell your possessions, and give alms.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Honor God with a sacrifice of thanksgiving and come into God's courts with praise.

Let us present our tithes and offerings to the Lord.

*Doxology #592 – In Unison

Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him, all creatures here below; Praise Him above, ye heavenly host: Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer (Responsive)

Please respond to the words "O God of hope" with "**increase our faith.**"

O God, your blessings are as plentiful as the stars above and as numerous as the grains of sand along the seashore, we come before you with grateful hearts as we pray for the church and the world, saying,

O God of hope,

increase our faith.

We pray for wisdom and guidance for all people and leaders of this world, that they may foster peace and justice and serve the common good.

O God of hope,

increase our faith.

We pray for your church, that by your grace and our faith we may serve you with constancy and love.

O God of hope,

increase our faith.

We pray for those who are sick or suffer any need,
that they would know your healing strength
and find comfort through our faithful care.

O God of hope,

increase our faith.

Help us to protect the goodness of your creation,
that all may enjoy the precious blessings of this world
as foretaste of the next.

O God of hope,

increase our faith.

We remember those who have died
and look to that heavenly city
where with you and all your saints
we will enter the everlasting heritage
of your faithful sons and daughters.

O God of hope,

increase our faith.

Holy God, steadfast and true,
on you our hope is founded.

Receive the prayers of your faithful people
for our hearts are gladdened by our trust in you.

Amen.

The Lord's Supper

Invitation

The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving (Responsive – See Bulletin insert)

The Lord's Prayer

Words of Institution

Communion of the People

Prayer After Communion

*Closing Hymn

“The Church's One Foundation” #442

*Charge and Blessing

Be dressed for action and ready to serve,
for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

Be not afraid,
for it is God's good pleasure to give you the kingdom,
an unfailing treasure and eternal blessing.