



The Gospel of Luke

Luke 12:1-14:35: Jesus Teaches "On the Road"

As we saw in the last session, one of the devices that Luke uses to structure his account of Jesus' teaching activity is his movement toward Jerusalem, where he set his sights in 9:51. Along the loosely defined pathway (see the notice about movement to Jerusalem at 13:22), he continues to teach and form his disciples. Accounts of miraculous healings punctuate the teaching (13:10-16; 14:1-6), both concerned with the propriety of healing on the Sabbath. Otherwise teaching dominates this part of the journey. Some teaching involves generally applicable moral advice: to avoid hypocrisy (12:1-3), not to care about worldly goods (12:22-23), to pay attention to the time (13:54-56) when judgment is imminent (13:22-30), to reconcile with enemies (12:57-59), to repent (13:1-5).

Some admonitions are directed specifically at those who would follow in Jesus' footsteps. They must be prepared to confess him openly (12:8-12), a saying that suggests that followers of Jesus in fact faced rejection and persecution. But the fallibility of disciples is also recognized. Uttering something against Jesus, the "Son of Man," can be forgiven, rejecting the "holy spirit" of forgiveness itself cannot (12:10). Disciples must recognize that their ministry, like that of Jesus himself will be a cause of division (12:49-53). Even more forcefully, Jesus declares that following him requires sacrifice, "hatred" of father and mother," and the willingness to take up a cross (14:25-27). The hyperbole in the saying about hating family members (contrast Matt 10:37-39) drives home the point that discipleship can be costly.

Disciples need to embody detachment from worldly things. Assured that the Father will provide, they must sell their belongings and give to the poor, keeping their treasure and their heart with God (12:29-34).

A small part of Jesus' teaching has to do with himself. Warned by friendly Pharisees that Herod (Antipas) was looking for him, Jesus responds with a comment that expresses his dedication as a prophet who must go to Jerusalem (13:32-33).

Jesus' teaching, as usual in Luke, is delivered with stories and vivid illustrations. The antithesis of the lack of concern for wealth is the rich fool who tells himself to eat, drink and be merry, on the eve of his encounter with the divine Judge (12:13-21). The lilies of the field and the birds of the air illustrate the natural trust that disciples should have in God (12:34-27). Disciples are like slaves awaiting their master's return (12:35-48). The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed

or a bit of leaven (13:18-20), small but potentially powerful. Those who set out to be disciples should, like contractors or generals going to war, make sure they know what the enterprise will cost (13:28-33).

The Parable of the Banquet

Along the way, Jesus must stop to eat, and meals provide the context for much important teaching, as they do in Jerusalem both before and after the crucifixion (see 22:7-23 and 24:13-49). At this point the occasion is a Sabbath dinner at the home of a leading Pharisee (14:1). The meal begins with one of Jesus' healings, of a man with dropsy, and his defense of that healing as action permitted on the Sabbath.

Table discourse continues with some sage advice, reminiscent of the book of Proverbs, about not being presumptuous about places of honor at table (14:7-11). Then the conversation takes what would be, from the point of view of polite convention, a strange turn, as Jesus admonishes his host to invite beggars and cripples when he throws a party (14:12-14). This advice is surely meant for the disciples reading this tale: fellowship with Jesus involves a radical hospitality.

At this point Jesus reinforces his admonition with one of his longer narrative parables, another version of which is found in Matt 22:1-10, which should be read for comparison. (Yet another version is found in the non-canonical Gospel of Thomas.) In this version, the story features a private individual who throws a great party, invites many people who have various excuses for not coming. He then sends his servants out, twice, to find others who may take an open place at table. The party giver, like the disciple, is radically hospitable. The parable ends with an ominous word of judgment about those who declined the original invitation (14:24).