



Opening Prayer for Ordinary Time

God of adventure and growth,
open our hearts, ready our minds
and fire our imaginations,
so that as we gather together before you,
and ponder the life-giving stories of Jesus,
we might discover more of your goodness,
and be swept up by the Holy Spirit
as she nurtures, disturbs and inspires us
on our journey into fullness of life.
Amen

'Starter for Ten' Discussion Question

Think of a time when expectations were overturned, and you had a pleasant surprise. What happened, and how did it impact you?

Prayers of Thanks and Praise

Generous and life-giving God,
it is your good pleasure to share the Kingdom with us,
and your love is the foundation of our trust in you.
In anxious and uncertain times, you are our anchor.
In challenging and unsettling times, you are our comfort.
In dark and lonely times, you are our light and peace.
Help us to ready ourselves to meet with you,

so that as we bring our thanks and praises,
we may be equipped to spread your message of hope.

In the name of Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit,
we bring you our praises and offer you our worship.

Amen

Prayers of Renewal

Sovereign and almighty God,
who creates, redeems and sustains everything that exists,
we come before as people who know our need of grace,
and who place our trust in your power to forgive.

When we have clung onto our wealth,
and have not been generous to those in need,
Lord, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

When we have not been alive to your work in the world,
and have failed to be diligent in following your ways,
Lord, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

When we have sought security at the expense of faith,
and have turned away from the risks of loving others,
Lord, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

Sovereign and almighty God,
who creates, redeems and sustains everything that exists,
we come before as people who know our need of grace,
and who place our trust in your power to forgive.
Thank you that you forgive our sins,
and set us free to be your people.
Amen

Reading Luke 12:32 – 40

Sermon

One of my favourite songs is by The Kinks, and it's called *Dedicated Follower of Fashion*. While I am not constitutionally built for summer weather and tend to default to t-shirts and shorts at this time of year, when the temperature does permit, I do like donning formal tailoring and, I hope, dressing to impress. Today's reading reveals variations on this theme, as Jesus instructs us to be dressed for action (12:35) before sharing a pair of parables which point to the urgency of being ready for the Kingdom to come in his very person. The passage has the feel of an Advent text because of these themes of alertness and readiness, and its nod to the Son of Man imagery utilised by Charles Wesley in his famous hymn *Lo! He Comes with Clouds Descending*. Our generous God, who is pleased to give us that Kingdom (12:32), requires us to be ready to share good news when called into action, and that is the focus of this part of Luke's Gospel.

This reading forms part of the Travel Narrative (9:51 – 19:27), which sees Jesus making his roundabout way up from Galilee towards the city of Jerusalem. Having been followed by crowds numbered in the thousands who were pressing in on him (12:1), Jesus responded to a man wanting him to settle a family dispute over inheritance (12:13) with a section of teaching about money (12:14 – 34), which overlaps towards the end of our passage. Following this, the emphasis shifts, as he moves onto a theme of alertness and readiness (12:35 – 40).

The resulting reading consists of three sections. In the first part, we have the profound promise that it is God's good pleasure to give us the Kingdom, and so we should not be afraid, but must be prepared to be generous to people in need and to store up treasure in heaven in the process (12:32 – 34). Its second section is a parable, picturing servants being alert for a returning master who subverts convention by serving them (12:35 – 38) just as Jesus was servant of all. Lastly, a note of urgency is sounded as a second parable speaks of thieves in the night and the Son of Man's unexpected arrival (12:39 – 40). I

note that while we are not to be afraid and there is a note of blessing here, the latter imagery reminds us that Jesus does not sooth every fear, and if we seek false security, we will be disappointed.

What we have, therefore, is an urgent calling to generous living, that finds its focus in the promise with which it begins about the Kingdom being freely given to us. God intends, desires and plans to grant this gift which yields fullness and abundance of life. In turn and reflecting the generosity given to us, we are called to live generously, and use that which we have been given to help others. Especially amidst the current cost of living crisis, there is something of the same elements of urgency and alertness present for us today as we look to respond to this challenging teaching. Giving time to those things that enable us to cultivate the required readiness is an important aspect of what it means to be a disciple of Christ. To be dressed for action is to be prepared and equipped to live bravely and generously.

Prayer is one such discipline that may help us. Ann Morisy uses the beautiful idea of 'cascades of grace', in her book *Journeying Out*. In committing ourselves to prayer, we become more sensitive to those opportunities to take action, and thus to serve others. In turn, Morisy says, our kindness and generosity may inspire more such acts, and like a chain reaction that is unstoppable when it gets going, graceful chains of divine activity may be unleashed. It follows that taking risk is also part of the picture, as well as a degree of self-sacrifice. That's where the going gets tough, prompting Peter in 12:41 to ask if Jesus is talking to his disciples or to the crowds at this point! God longs to bless us, and bless us a lot, but also to urgently spread the message of love Jesus embodied, so that others may also receive that gift of the Kingdom. May we have the courage to take up this challenge.

Prayers of Intercession and Lord's Prayer

Blessing