

Seminar Luke
Presbytery South Moreton

PENTECOST AND BEYOND – PART 1

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19/5/19

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Ministry in Galilee (4:14-9:50)

In this section (as elsewhere) Luke uses his sources by incorporating even more teaching of Jesus beyond his use of Mark. Jesus is filled with the Spirit in his return to Galilee (4:14). Indeed in this entire section, the focus is in Galilee. While parallel accounts in *Matthew* and *Mark* at this point have Jesus venturing into Gentile territory, *Luke* does not have this. The only exception is his moving into the country of the Gerasenes (8:20). Even here it is listed as being “opposite Galilee.” For *Luke* the mission to the Gentiles will come later on (after Pentecost). This section therefore is basically the mission to Israel.¹

¹ Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Luke: A New Commentary for Preachers* (London: SPCK, 1982), 51.

Jesus in the Synagogue (4:16-30)

Talbert identifies a concentric structure here in vv. 16-20:²

He stood up to read (16c)
 There was given to him (17a)
 Opening the book (17b)
 Isa 61:1f; plus 58:6 (18-19)
 Closing the book (20a)
 He gave it back to the attendant (20b)
He sat down (20c)

This structuring acts to highlight the quote from Isaiah 58:6 and 61:1. Now we have the inauguration of the mission of Christ and the inauguration of the reign of God of justice and mercy.³

The acceptable year of the Lord is the year of Jubilee prescribed in Leviticus 25 for debts to be forgiven and land would be returned to families who had to lease them. It is a statement of social justice in God's order of life. It was a looking forward to the eschatological Jubilee of the age of salvation, a message relevant for our world today.

In this section we have a statement about Jesus' ministry, his manifesto. Jesus in quoting this scripture gives emphasis to the poor and oppressed in his gospel message. This will become the ministry of the church empowered by the Holy Spirit as the mission continues to the whole world in *Acts*.

When Luke quotes "proclaiming release to the captives" and "setting at liberty the oppressed", the Greek word behind this is *aphesis* which is often used to express forgiveness. Therefore there may also be this undertone in the usage here.

Talbert notes that what follows in 4:31-41 demonstrates Jesus as an exorcist and healer and 4:43 associates this with his preaching the good news of the Reign of God. He writes:⁴

Given this it seems correct to understand Luke's view of Jesus' mission, as set forth in 4:18-19, to include preaching, physical healing, and exorcism. This threefold activity, moreover, is portrayed as continuing in the ministry of the disciples in Acts (preaching – e.g. Acts 2:14ff.; 3:12ff.; 10:34ff.; 13:16ff.; healing – e.g., Acts 3:1ff.; 9:33ff.; 9:36ff.; 14:8ff.; exorcism – e.g., Acts 16:16ff; 19:12ff.). It is this threefold form of ministry that the empowering by the Holy Spirit produces both in Jesus and in the disciples: the ministry of Master and disciples alike focuses on the whole person.

The nice words soon turn to severe and stern words. Jesus mentions stories from the great prophets Elijah and Elisha with words of judgment. The widow of Zarephath

² Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 54-55.

³ David L. Tiede, *Luke* (Augsburg Commentary; Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 104.

⁴ Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 55-56.

and Naaman were Gentiles (see 1 Kgs 17; 2 Kgs 5) who were outside the elect of Israel. The good news, however, goes to the Gentiles. This is most significant.

In 5:1-11 Jesus calls the disciples in the middle of a successful ministry where crowds are pressing in on him (5:1). The call also includes a commissioning of the disciples to go fishing for people. However they are warned by their experience of not being able to obtain a successful catch without Jesus' assistance, that in their ministry, they also will need to rely on the help of Christ. Their mission (as illustrated in Acts 2) must be Spirit led and guided.

Geldenhuis writes:⁵

In chapters iv and v Luke gives an account of the progressive Messianic self-revelation of Jesus. He continues this in the first 11 verses of chapter vi and finally shows in verses 12-16 how the Lord chose the 12 apostles as the founders, the first institution of the congregation of God's new people ...

Blessings and Woes (6:20-26)

In 6:20-49 Luke has included material similar to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew (chs. 5-7). The passage 6:20-26 particularly includes four beatitudes and four woes. This section is sometimes referred to as Luke's "Sermon on the Plain" in comparison with Matthew's "Sermon on the Mount".

In this passage it is apparent that what happens finally in life will depend upon the attitude one has towards Jesus and his words.

"Blessed" means fortunate, happy or blessed "in an all-embracing sense." "Woe" is not necessarily a denunciation by Jesus but a lament, equivalent to "alas for you!".⁶

Some scholars take Luke's words as expressing deeper spiritual realities. For example Geldenhuis writes:⁷

Where outward poverty leads anyone to realise his [*sic*] utter dependence on God and to walk humbly with his [*sic*] Lord, such a person will be blessed in measure even in this life, and more abundantly in the next, may expect rich and glorious fullness of spiritual life and joy.

And regarding v. 21, these are spiritually hungry people:⁸

... those who realise their own unworthiness and need and who yearn for the fullness of life which He brings, will receive the blessing – the congratulation of the Lord. And those who mourn deeply in sorrow over the sins of their own hearts and the dishonouring of the Lord by the world will receive real comfort and joy.

Again with the woes, Geldenhuis believes Jesus is not referring to the outwardly rich but those who seek their happiness chiefly in material things and do not place their

⁵ Norval Geldenhuis, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Michigan, 1993), 209.

⁶ Geldenhuis, *Luke*, 216.

⁷ Geldenhuis, *Luke*, 210.

⁸ Geldenhuis, *Luke*, 210

dependence upon God. They are therefore spiritually poor. They will starve spiritually as they take pleasure only in earthly things and come into darkness and sorrow as a result.⁹

Other scholars would choose to read these woes and blessings at their literal level and see Luke's passion to address the injustices between rich and poor and between the oppressors and the oppressed emerging strongly here. They see here in *Luke* that Jesus is continuing his good message to the poor and oppressed, as announced in chapter 4. There is no spiritualising to be done here, rather we are to hear the challenging and perhaps even offensive words of Jesus at face value. For the poor and oppressed they will find liberation in the reign of God. They have been chosen by God to be part of this reign. Tannehill argues that while the rich seem to be harshly treated in the woes "there is an underlying conviction that those who hoard what the poor need are held responsible before God."¹⁰

As well as proclaiming the values of God in our world the blessings and woes also raise questions of security in life. Will our security be in our wealth? Can we let go of it to be good news to the poor? This is a theme which will be further developed in *Luke*.

Widow's Son Raised (7:11-17)

Jesus has just performed an amazing healing of the centurion's servant from a distance (7:1-10). This story shows similarities with the encounter of Peter with Cornelius in Acts (chs. 10-11).

Now, astonishingly, he raises a person from the dead, a story only recorded in *Luke*. The plural of "dead" in Greek later in 7:22 suggests that Jesus has raised several people from the dead (see also 8:49-56).

In v. 13 Jesus is addressed as "the Lord", a term which is slightly unusual in *Luke*. Is there some special understanding of the lordship of Christ that he even has power over death here?

In this miracle Jesus does not seek for any faith on the part of any parties involved. He acts according to his compassion (v. 13) and his miraculous intervention would have portrayed him as a mighty prophet such as Elijah. Elijah himself also raised to life again the only son of a widow (1 Kgs 17:17-24). When Elijah raised the boy he also "gave him to his mother". The widow's response to Elijah was "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth." Hence the crowd responds to Jesus that a great **prophet** has arisen (Luke 7:16).

Tiede writes: "for those with the eyes to see and the ears to hear, this mighty act of Jesus is a manifestation of the saving "visitation" of God's reign, and Jesus is 'the prophet' who speaks for God and enacts God's will."¹¹

⁹ Geldenhuys, *Luke*, 210.

¹⁰ Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 115.

¹¹ Tiede, *Luke*, 153.

Widows in these days were vulnerable people in terms of income and provision. There may not have been any males left in the family to support her which would have made her grief even more intense and her economic plight more severe.

The Holy Spirit in Luke/Acts

Luke (and this is continued in *Acts*) places great emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit. Particularly, Jesus is filled with the Holy Spirit. Luke mentions the Holy Spirit more frequently than Matthew and Mark.

The birth narratives make this clear.

- His parents are filled with the Spirit (1:15, 41, 67).
- Simeon is a person of the Spirit (3 times in 2:25-27).
- The presence of the Holy Spirit is with John the Baptist (1:15), his mother Elizabeth (1:41), Zechariah his father (1:67).
- Jesus is conceived of the Spirit (1:34-35)

Jesus is often described as full of the Spirit or led by the Spirit.
4:1, 14, 18 - Jesus filled with the spirit (cf. Matt 4:12//Mark 1:14)
10:21 - Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit

Only Luke emphasises the Spirit's role in Jesus' ministry

Compare the parallel Mark 1:12-13 with Luke 4:1, 2. Unlike Jesus being driven by the Spirit in *Mark*, Luke says Jesus "full of the Holy Spirit was led by the Spirit in the wilderness". Jesus will baptise with the Holy Spirit according to John the Baptist (3:16 - also parallels in *Matthew* and *Mark*).

The ministry of Jesus is under the Holy Spirit when he quotes Isaiah "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me for he has anointed me" (4:18)

In *Acts* the Spirit is seen as the creative and prophetic presence of God. It is not limited to John or Jesus. It is the initiator of a new era of history and God's working with people.

Luke 24:49 foretells the coming of the Holy Spirit of power on the disciples. The Spirit will instruct the disciples (12:12; cf. Acts 4:8; 6:10; 7:2, 55).

"Luke reassures Theophilus that, though the Messiah is dead and seemingly absent, he is present in the gift and presence of the Spirit he has sent."¹²

Turner writes:¹³

¹² Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 33.

“... the Spirit *is the power on the Messiah that enables him to effect the saving liberation and reign of God that he proclaims*. And blasphemy against the Spirit’ (Lk. 12:10) is probably continuing resolute opposition to this work of the Spirit.”

Bovon summarises the scholarship:¹⁴

- 1) The relationship that Luke establishes between the Holy Spirit and salvation history are clear. After Pentecost all believers receive a gift, which in the OT had only touched a few prophets and then during the second stage of salvation history was centred on Jesus alone.
- 2) The pre-Easter Jesus lived in a relationship with the Holy Spirit that the disciples will never know. He alone was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Luke wants this distinction to be clear.
- 3) Despite the outpouring of the Spirit on all believers, who are then indelibly marked, this divine force can still arise from time to time with a precise and particular goal, which is most often prophetic.
- 4) The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal power for Luke; the Spirit gains personal stature comparable to God or Christ.
- 5) The links between the exalted Christ and the Spirit are difficult to determine. The Spirit appears frequently distinct from the risen One (cf. the Pentecost narrative in which Luke does not explicate that the risen Lord sends the Spirit himself; ... However, Luke knows that the risen Christ in the place of God will pour out the Spirit and that this outpouring will be conditioned by the exaltation (cf. Luke 24:45; Acts 2:33).
- 6) Like the Word, the Spirit is independent of human and earthly contingencies. Yet the Spirit appears here and there dangerously at the disposition of the apostles.

Jesus Who Includes Women, The Poor, the Marginalised

Jesus is one who cares for the outcast, for the Samaritan, for the poor, for women. Jesus is the one who shows compassion.

The Poor

Luke 4:18-19:

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

This passage occurs only in *Luke* and is the fulfilment of prophecy.

¹³ Max Turner, "Luke and the Spirit," in Craig Bartholomew et al, *Reading Luke* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2005), 277.

¹⁴ Francois Bovon, *Luke the Theologian*, 2nd edn. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), 249.

The following also illustrates Luke's concern for the poor:

6:20 blessed are you poor (not poor in spirit in Matthew)

7:22 the poor have good news preached to them (// Matt 11:5)

12:13-21 parable of the rich fool who was not rich toward God

14:13 when you have a feast invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed." (unique to *Luke*)

Parallel Matt 22:9 // Luke 14:21

14: 21 So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in **the poor**, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.'

Note here Luke's special mention of the "poor and maimed and blind and lame".

16: 19 - 31 parable of rich man and poor Lazarus (only *Luke*)

18: 22 (// Matt and Mark) but in *Luke* the word for "give to poor" (*diadidomi*) is unique to *Luke* and tends to emphasise the distribution.

19: 8 – the story of Zacchaeus giving half to the poor (only *Luke*)

(See also 21:1-4, the poor widow's gift of 2 coins // Matt 12:41-44)

Luke's repeated call for the wealthy to enter the kingdom by releasing themselves of their possessions (12:32-33; 18:24-25) is often a difficult message for our society and churches to swallow.

In 8:14 like the seeds choked by thorns we can be choked by the cares, riches and pleasures of life. In 11:41 we are urged to give the inner things for alms. In 14:33 we cannot be a disciple if we do not give up possessions.

In 16:13 it is blunt that one cannot serve God and mammon.

Although possessions are not in themselves evil for Luke or Jesus, they are best used for the benefit of the poor – the rich man should have cared for poor Lazarus sitting at his gate, a location which meant that the rich man therefore knew and walked past Lazarus regularly (16:19-31). Selling possessions and giving to the poor shows that a person's heart is in heaven (12:32-34). This radical form of discipleship demonstrates real trust in God, for he will give the kingdom to such people (12:32f).

Luke is not advocating that all Christians should sell everything, for he will go on to tell in Acts of the disciples meeting in homes, which means that not everyone sold them (e.g. Acts 2:46; 12:12). But he is warning of great dangers in wealth, which can easily lead to self-trust, rather than reliance upon God (again note the rich fool, Luke 12:13-21).¹⁵

¹⁵ David Wenham and Paul Walton, *Exploring the New Testament* (London: SPCK), 249.

and the Marginalised

The Samaritans were not liked by the Jews and were marginalised. Luke gives them special attention:

9:51-56 Jesus rebukes James and John for wishing to call down fire on the Samaritan village;

10:29-37 the hero of the story is not the Jewish clergy but the "Good Samaritan";

17:16 the only leper who thanked Jesus for healing was a Samaritan

Those to whom the good news is announced are shepherds.

What happens when the people of God's Reign come into contact with people of influence?

Women

While Matthew and Mark include women in their stories, Luke adds more.

In Luke 1 and 2, right from the beginning we have Mary and Elizabeth in the infancy narrative. There is more focus on Mary than Joseph. Mary's response to the angel's word is more positive than Zechariah's. We have the mention of Anna the prophet.

In 8:1-3 Luke mentions those who were with Jesus - there were the 12 and then specifically mentions "some women" and mentions some by name (no parallel with *Matthew* and *Mark*)

While Jesus was carrying the cross Luke 23:27 mentions "and of women ... Daughters of Jerusalem."

Luke also mentions:

The widow of Nain (7:11-17),

the "sinful woman" who washed Jesus' feet (7:36-50),

the story of Martha and Mary 10:38-42,

the cure of the crippled woman (13:10-17),

the parable of the woman and the lost coin (15:8-10)

and the parable of the widow who kept bothering the judge to seek justice (18:1-8).

The witness of the women to the empty tomb is regarded as only idle talk until it can be confirmed by other men.

All these, with one exception, are unique to *Luke*, something which is quite significant for a patriarchal society.

Moxnes points out that women don't "leave" or "follow" in *Luke*, rather they continue their typical roles as 'serving' (4:38-39; 8:2-3) however their presence in Jerusalem actually indicates their following (23:27-31, 49, 55. See also 24:6, 8)

So Luke makes sure we hear about Jesus' concern for people who are not always at "the top of the tree".

In fact he often deals with binary opposites e.g. the priest and the Levite vs. the Samaritan; the wealthy city dwellers vs. the beggars; the solitary rich man, hoarding wealth for himself vs. the villagers who gather their community to share their joy.

The Travel Narrative (9:51-19:48)

This fourth main section in *Luke* is set in Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. This section dominates the book. About half of it is unique to *Luke*.

This 'journey' may not be in chronological order. Neither does it portray a direct route to Jerusalem. In 10:38-42 Jesus is near Jerusalem, while later in the section, he is back in the north. It is a journey as part of God's plan.

There are several allusions to the journey notes en route (9:51; 13:22; 17:11; 18:31; 19:28, 41) as Jesus travels to meet his appointed ending in Jerusalem (Luke 13:31-35).

On this "journey" a new way to follow God is offered. This is not the route proposed by the religious leadership. The theme throughout is 'listen to him.'¹⁶

This section contains about 8 chapters of teaching including a significant section of parable material (17 in number).

During this journey there are several indications of coming rejection, death and resurrection: 12:49-50; 13:33-34; 16:31; 17:25; 18:31-33; 19:14.

Jesus Who Follows the Path and Geography

Jesus feels compelled to do God's work. Especially he feels compelled to go to Jerusalem. It is a necessity. There is a Greek word *dei* which is used to express some compulsion or necessity.

In the ancient world there was much philosophical discussion about the place of Fate. Is everything determined or do we have free will?

Luke is aware of the dilemma which his own emphasis on divine providence produces. Predestination or free-will? Luke however avoids any big discussion on

¹⁶ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50* (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids, 2008), 23.

the topic. He does offer a resolution of the problem, for as well as the hellenistic language of cosmic determinism which he uses, the *dei* phrases, we find a balancing emphasis on human responsibility.

The interplay between divine and human actors throughout Luke's two volumes can be seen especially in the possibility of opposing the plan of God and through those individuals (especially Jesus and Paul) who play significant roles in the plan of God, not merely as human pawns of some arbitrary divine necessity, but as key figures in implementing that plan.

The first thing that Jesus says in public in the Gospel is when he is 12 and found in the Temple by his parents who had lost him. 2:49 "did you not know that I must be about my Father's business." Here is this word *dei* which describes how Jesus must do God's will. It is his inner necessity.

Later Luke in his own way has Jesus saying "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose" (4: 43) Here Luke stresses when he borrows from Mark but adds the emphasis, how he must do God's business.

Luke 9:51 is a significant turn in the Gospel. Jesus starts to head to Jerusalem. From here on there are numerous references that he has set his face to Jerusalem and this is his goal and that he is on this journey. 9:51 speaks of Jesus "setting his face" to go. Again we see Jesus' determination and the reader is repeatedly reminded of this goal (10:38; 13:22,33; 17:11; 18:31; 19:28,36) over the next few chapters.

While on this journey Jesus says "I must go on my way, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem" (13:33)

At the Last Supper in 22:22 Jesus emphasises that his journey was going "as it had been determined". Jesus then follows the path that he must follow. Three times the necessity of what Jesus had to do is recalled in the resurrection accounts

In 24:6-7 the angel at the tomb said: "Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again."

24:26

Jesus on the road to Emmaus with the two disciples:

"Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?"

24:44

Jesus said to the 11 disciples and their companions: *"These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you--that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled."*

So Jesus' journey to Jerusalem and the suffering he encountered there are bound together.

To quote John Squires:

“His journey marks out his pathway of discipleship; this becomes our pathway of discipleship, too. Before he sets out on this journey, Jesus calls his disciples: deny yourself, take up your cross day-by-day, and follow me (8:34). He challenges them to leave the dead to bury their dead (9: 60) and not to put your hand to the plough and look back (9: 62).”

Fulfilment of the divine necessity in Luke-Acts means fulfilling both the prophetic promise and also the ethical demand.

Jesus in *Luke* and *Acts* is compelled by obedience, but in the sense of commitment to humanity and encouraging others to be part of the divine necessity in being actors in the implementation of God’s purpose. Thus Jesus is fiercely loyal to God’s will.

Jesus acknowledges the loyalty of his disciples in 22:28-30:

“You are those who have stood by me in my trials;²⁹ and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom,³⁰ so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

Jerusalem becomes an important iconic site in *Luke*. The story begins there, Jesus must be in the Father’s house there, and *Luke* will finish there. It is from there that the Gospel must go into the rest of the world as spelt out in *Acts*. “Viewed from the course of Luke’s narrative, however, he is concerned to present the temple as a place determined by Jesus. He is the salvation, a light of revelation and glory (Luke 2:30-32), and he speaks of the temple as ‘my Father’s house’ (Luke 2:49). Thus, the relation between Jesus and the temple in the infancy narrative prepares the transformation of the temple and Jerusalem that follows later in the story.”¹⁷

To quote Moxnes:¹⁸

Luke partly changes the value and relevance of old iconic sites, like Jerusalem, and introduces or transforms other sites, like Bethlehem and Nazareth. The point of the travel narrative, the important middle section of Luke’s gospel, is to portray Jesus, not Jerusalem, as the main geographical center in the land. And the journey is a pilgrimage, through which the followers are formed into a community expecting and being shaped by the Kingdom of God. In the deep structure of the narrative the Kingdom is a Thirdspace, challenging the power structures of the land.

10:25-11:13 is the second main part in the major teaching section of Luke and deals with various aspects in the life of the disciples.

¹⁷ Halvor Moxnes, “Landscape and Spatiality: Placing Jesus,” in *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament*, eds. Dietmar Neufeld and Richard E. DeMaris (London/New York: Routledge, 2010), 99.

¹⁸ Moxnes, “Landscape and Spatiality,” 106.

The Good Samaritan

v. 25 – “trying to test” suggests a hostile attitude

Jesus’ question *pōs anaginōskeis* suggests ‘how do you recite?’ i.e. what is the law recited that is part of his regular worship and the lawyer is forced to reply with the words of the *Shema*.

The Jews interpreted ‘neighbour’ in terms of members of the same people and religious community, i.e. fellow Jews. The same obligation was extended to the resident alien but Jewish usage excluded Samaritans and foreigners from this category. (Marshall).

v. 29 – “lawyer” is Luke’s name for a scribe

v. 30 – the trip from Jerusalem to Jericho is about 18 miles through desert and rocky country and drops about 1,000m. It was notorious for robbers.

vv. 31, 32 – the priest and Levite had privileged status. They were associated with the Temple cult and the heart of Jewish life as worship of the Lord. In NT times the Levites were an order of cultic officials inferior to the priests but nevertheless a privileged group in Jewish society. They were responsible for the liturgy in the temple and for policing it. (Marshall).

Touching of the dead defiled those particularly those of priestly or Levitical status (Num 5:2; 19:2-13).

Apparently the priest was return from a period of duty in the temple to his home in the country, for Jericho was one of the principal country residences for priests.

The regulations on defilement also occur in the Samaritan Pentateuch but that didn’t hinder the Samaritan.

v. 34 – the medicinal use of oil and wine is well attested (Marshall).

v. 35 – the cost of one day’s board was 1/12 denarius (Marshall).

“Love does not define its object” (Fitzmyer)

Our neighbour that we love is even someone we don’t know and of a people that do not love us. Religion should not interfere with love.

This is the setting for the Lord’s Prayer, while in *Matthew* the context for that prayer is the Sermon on the Mount. Luke’s version is slightly different to Matthew’s, although it is conceivable Jesus could have given the prayer on more than one occasion. (Luke has separated the Prayer at 11:2-4 and the Beatitudes 6:20-23, or has Matthew brought them together?). Many believe that the versions we have in *Luke* and *Matthew* are the versions used in their respective churches.¹⁹

¹⁹ Marsh and Moyise, *Jesus and the Gospels*, 42.

Discipleship is discussed in this section. The disciples are taught about mission, commitment, love for God, love for one's neighbour, devotion to Jesus and prayer (9:51-11:13).

Discipleship is rated above all other demands in 9:57-62. Wholehearted love for God and neighbour is expounded in 10:25-37. Devotion to Jesus is exemplified as sitting at his feet listening (10:38-42).²⁰ This is followed by learning to pray from Jesus (11:1-13).

12:1-48 resumes the topic of discipleship and notes the themes of trusting God, not riches, not people and remaining faithful. The disciples need to understand the nature of the times (12:49-14:24). Disciples need to enter via the narrow door (13:23-30). Discipleship has a cost (12:4-7).

Indeed discipleship requires total commitment (14:25-35). 15:1-32 describes their mission to seek the lost as God does. Discipleship involves generous service to others (16:1-31). The follower of Jesus looks for Jesus' return (17:11-18:8). The disciple is called to humility, generosity and trust (18:9-30).²¹

Scobie writes:²²

In recent decades it has become popular to speak of one's 'faith journey'. Interpreters, however, must seek always to be open to the challenge of Christ as presented in the central travel narrative. The concept of a 'faith journey' is capable of being interpreted in very individualistic and introspective terms. The journey to which Jesus calls his hearers/readers, as both Acts and the Pauline epistles so amply illustrate, involves decision and risk, but also participation in a community of faith engaged in outreach and service. It calls for total commitment ... Christian discipleship involves embarking on a journey guided by the Holy Spirit, sustained by prayer, living by faith, and with singleness of purpose witnessing to the gospel in ever new situations. Far from settling down and becoming comfortable in this world, Christian readers of Luke are called to be a people on the move, a people in this world but not of it, a people who do not say 'Hallelujah! I'm saved!' but a people who, because they know they have been saved, are involved in universal mission, compassionate service, and the struggle for justice and peace in the world today.

Pentecost – Acts 2:1-21 – The Day of Pentecost

See also the section above: "The Holy Spirit in Luke/Acts"

The day of Pentecost (also known as the Feast of Weeks or the Day of the Firstfruits (see Exod 34:22; Num 28:26; Deut 16:10) was celebrated 50 days after the presentation of the first sheaf to be reaped of the barley harvest, and thus the fiftieth

²⁰ Wenham and Walton, *Exploring the New Testament*, 244.

²¹ Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 24.

²² Charles H.H. Scobie, "A Canonical Approach to Interpreting Luke," in Bartholomew et al, *Reading Luke*, 347.

day from the first Sunday after Passover. In later Judaism it was seen as the anniversary of the giving of the law on Sinai.²³

The Greek word *pneuma* can mean wind, breath or spirit. The whole scene in the passage is reminiscent of Ezekiel prophesying to the wind to blow on the dry bones that he saw in the vision. It was God's breath which brought life (Ezek. 37:9–14). Often in the Old Testament wind accompanied the appearance of God (cf. 1 Kgs 19:11; Isa 66:15). The Spirit of God has now come on the disciples in power and life.

As well as the word-play of "wind" there is also the word-play of fire as tongues of fire we seen to come on the disciples. There are allusions to John the Baptist's prediction of the one coming who would baptise with wind and fire (Luke 3:16–17). The experience is also reminiscent of the burning bush which Moses saw (Exod 3:2-5) indicating the presence of God.

While there is some dispute about where this Pentecostal experience took place, it seems the most likely scenario is that the disciples were together in a house. The most likely place for the gathering is the upper room where they had been praying, which they left to move onto the streets while speaking in the foreign languages. Presumably they would have gone then to the outer courts of the Temple where Peter addressed the crowds who had followed and gathered.

Bruce speaks of the tongues:

Speaking with tongues, or glossolalia (as it is commonly called), is not an unparalleled phenomenon. Not only are the speakers' words partially or completely beyond their conscious control, but they are uttered in languages of which they have no command in normal circumstances. Within the New Testament there is ample attestation of another form of glossolalia—it was a "spiritual gift" highly valued in the Corinthian church. Paul acknowledges that the Corinthian glossolalia is a genuine gift of the Holy Spirit, but deprecates the undue importance which some members of the church of Corinth attach to it (1 Cor. 12:10, 28–30; 14:2–19). As cultivated in the church of Corinth, glossolalia was uttered in a speech which no hearer could understand until someone present received the correlative spiritual gift of interpretation. But in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost the words spoken by the disciples in their divine ecstasy were immediately recognized by the visitors from many lands who heard them. ... On the present occasion the content of the ecstatic utterances was "the mighty deeds of God" (v. 11), and the range of the languages in which these were proclaimed suggests that Luke thought of the coming of the Spirit more particularly as a preparation for the worldwide proclamation of the gospel.²⁴

It is unclear who was in the upper room on this day. Polhill offers the following:

On whom did the Spirit descend? Was it the 120 mentioned in 1:15 or only the Twelve apostles? In 2:14 Luke mentioned only the Twelve, but there it probably was to connect them with Peter's speech, which appealed to their special role as eyewitnesses to the resurrection (2:32). The presence of the large crowd testifying

²³ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 49–62.

²⁴ Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 49–62.

to the witness of the Spirit-filled Christians (2:6–11) would indicate that the full 120 were involved, as would the text Peter quoted from Joel that refers to women as well as men prophesying (2:17–18).²⁵

The experience of the foreign visitors coming to Jerusalem for the Passover is the early indication in Luke's narrative of the good news spreading out from Jerusalem to the rest of the world. Later in Acts the Gentiles will also be included in this spread.

Bruce shares an interesting parallel:

When the law was given at Sinai, according to later rabbinic tradition, "the ten commandments were promulgated with a single voice, yet it says, 'All the people perceived the *voices*' (Ex. 20:18); this shows that when the voice went forth it was divided into seven voices and then went into seventy tongues, and every people received the law in its own language." Late as this form of the tradition is, it was already accepted in some Jewish circles that Pentecost marked the anniversary of the giving of the law,²⁰ and there may be an implied parallel between that event and what was now happening in the statement that people "from every nation under heaven" heard the praises of God, "each individual ... in his own speech."²⁶

Bruce describes the implications of the Joel quotation:

Then comes a statement of tremendous import: "This is what was said through the prophet Joel." Joel, like other Old Testament prophets, had spoken of what was going to take place in the "last days." Peter's quotation of his prophecy means that these days, the days of the fulfilment of God's purpose, have arrived. In another place Peter tells how the prophets who foretold the coming manifestation of God's grace "searched and inquired about this salvation; they inquired what person or time was indicated by the Spirit of Christ within them when predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories" (1 Pet. 1:10–11). But now that Christ has been "made manifest at the end of the times" (1 Pet. 1:20), his followers have no further need to search and inquire (as the prophets themselves did) what person or time the prophetic Spirit pointed to, for they *know*: the person is Jesus; the time is now. The "last days" began with Christ's appearance on earth and will be consummated by his reappearance; they are the days during which the age to come overlaps the present age. Hence the assurance with which Peter could quote the prophet's words and declare "This is it."²⁷

Luke uses this quote to highlight the motif of fulfillment. Now is the instigation of the last days as evidenced by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Polhill writes:

Verse 4 gives the result of the Spirit's coming on those gathered in the upper room. They were "filled with the Holy Spirit," and this led them to "speak in other tongues." From this point on in Acts, the gift of the Spirit became a normative concomitant of becoming a Christian believer (2:38). The expression of this differs; in 9:17 Saul is said to have been "filled" with the Spirit, as here.

²⁵ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 96–110.

²⁶ Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 49–62.

²⁷ Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 49–62.

Sometimes this experience is described as a “baptism” in the Spirit (1:5; 11:16). In other instances the word “poured out” is used (2:17f.; 10:45) or “came upon” (8:16; 10:44; 11:15) or simply “receive” (2:38; 10:47). All these instances refer to new converts and point to the Spirit’s coming in various ways, not always signified by tongues, as a permanent gift to every believer. This should be distinguished from other references to “filling,” where the Spirit comes upon one who is already a believer in a time of special inspiration and testimony to the faith (cf. 4:8, 31; 7:55; 13:9).

There are strong reasons, however, for questioning whether the Pentecost experience could have been the sort of ecstatic language Paul dealt with at Corinth. From Paul’s treatment the glossolalia there was clearly not rational discourse but an ecstatic “praise language,” edifying to the individual tongue-speaker, but not to the church (1 Cor 14:1–5). It was as meaningless to others as indistinct musical notes or a language totally foreign to them (1 Cor 14:6–12). For the church Paul preferred to speak “five intelligible words” (“with my mind,” RSV) than ten thousand “in tongues” (1 Cor 14:19). The Pentecost experience did seem to involve intelligible communication to those in the Jewish crowd.²⁸

Verse 11 supplies the only indication of what the believers were saying. They were declaring the wonders of God as they brought forth praise to God. As often in Luke/Acts while there were some who accepted the message, there were many who were sceptical.

Polhill summarises the features of this passage:²⁹

First, his major emphasis doubtless was that the church has now been empowered for its mission. Everything in chap. 1 has anticipated this event (1:5, 8). With the coming of the Spirit, the witness began. It began with the enthusiastic praise of the Spirit-filled Christians and the inspired sermon of Peter, and it resulted in the immediate harvest of 3,000 converts to Christ (2:41). And there is certainly a second, closely related theme of the text. Just as Pentecost was the festival of the firstfruits, so these are the “firstfruits” of the harvest in the Spirit. This connects with a third emphasis of the text: the spiritual harvest did not culminate at Pentecost. It began there and continued in ever-widening circles, from Jerusalem to Samaria to Antioch, from Cyprus to Asia Minor, from Greece to Rome, from Jews to Samaritans, from God-fearers to Gentiles.

The worldwide scope of the Christian witness is anticipated at Pentecost in the roll call of nations (vv. 9–11). To be sure, it was a question of only Jews and Jewish proselytes at this point, but they were Diaspora Jews and represented “every nation under heaven” (v. 5). Already the national barrier had been overcome. The racial barriers would be overcome, and the gospel would be shared with “every *people* under heaven” (alternate rendering of the Greek *ethnos*). Pentecost foreshadowed the worldwide mission. Finally, the pouring out of the Spirit has eschatological significance. It inaugurated the final period in God’s plan of salvation. He acted decisively and definitely in Jesus Christ to

²⁸ Polhill, *Acts*, 96–110.

²⁹ Polhill, *Acts*, 96–110.

create a people for his own. The Spirit is the sign of these final times. This central emphasis comprised a major part of Peter's sermon.

The main themes of Peter's sermon include the scriptural background (Joel 2:28–32; Ps 16:8–11; 110:1) including a demonstration that Jesus was the Messiah, reference to Jesus' ministry and his death and resurrection, plus a call to repentance. These themes were common elements in the preaching of the early church.

Peter's use of the Joel prophecy indicates his seeing these events as the inauguration of the last days, including the advent and resurrection of the Messiah. Now all the sons and daughters are prophesying. What is different now, as *Acts* will later reveal, the Spirit is being poured out not just on Jews but Gentiles also.

Polhill concludes:

Verse 21 was the most important verse for Peter: "Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved." For Peter the "Lord" in the context of this sermon was Jesus Christ. Everything that followed in the sermon—Christ's death, his resurrection, his exaltation—pointed in the same direction. Whoever calls on his name, whoever confesses him as Lord, will be saved. Appropriately, Peter concluded his appeal with this same theme of calling (v. 39).³⁰

For the Preacher

In the experience outlined in this passage, only those who are in a relationship with Jesus Christ can understand what God is doing. Soards *et al* highlight that this knowledge is a source of privilege. "Whatever we know by the grace of God is given to us in order to direct us to ministry."³¹ The preacher can explore what were the outworkings of this significant event, both in *Acts*, in the early Church, in the Church down through the centuries, and finally the Church today.

As Luke has portrayed the narrative of the *Gospel* and then the *Book of Acts*, he demonstrates the mighty working of God throughout history. This passage has demonstrated the fulfilling of the promises made by the prophets of old, and through the promise of Jesus, as Luke's good news message is moving from ancient Israel, through Galilee, to Jerusalem, and then on to the ends of the earth. Thus this passage indicates a vital hinge between the work of Christ and the continuing work of Christ through the Holy Spirit. Luke stresses the importance of the reception of this power to continue the work of God. People of all generations need to hear this message of reliance on God's Holy Spirit.

Soards *et al* write: "there is a certain sense in which the past (prophetic utterances), present (outpouring of the Holy Spirit), and future (the Last Days) interact as a single time in the event of Pentecost. Pentecost is simultaneously a fulfilment of past divine promises and a taste of the end of time wrapped up in the present, and it is this twist

³⁰ Polhill, *Acts*, 96–110.

³¹ Marion Soards, Thomas Dozeman, Kendall McCabe, *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary Year C Lent/Easter* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 173.

of time that gives rise to Christian ministry. This peculiar fact of time is the content of the gospel.”³²

What is the place of the Spirit in our congregations?

Pentecost 3 – Luke 9:51-62 – The Samaritan Village and Following Jesus

This passage marks the beginning of Jesus’ journey towards Jerusalem. See above under the section: “The Travel Narrative (9:51-19:48)”. This journey takes up a great deal of Luke’s Gospel, suggesting its central significance.

Here in the opening verses (9:51–10:24) we see Jesus guiding his disciples by setting his own example of engaging in mission. In the first part of this passage, Jesus handles rejection. The following verses (9:57–62) focus on the radical nature of following Jesus. The next section (10:1–24) will initiate the disciples into Jesus’ own manner of engaging in mission. (We see how much of the instruction there can be illustrated by Jesus’ own practice in the following chapters.) We see Jesus has already been preparing the disciples in 9:21-50.

The encounter with the Samaritan village is special to Luke. Jesus sends some ahead to prepare the way, perhaps in keeping with the eschatological preparatory role of Elijah (Mal 4:5-6). These messengers are rejected by the village and so James and John suggest a further imitation of Elijah in calling fire down from heaven (2 Kings 1:10-12). Jesus rebukes them for such a suggestion. He will give more instructions about handling rejection in 10:1–12, and so they move on.

(The story is a first indication of the mission to the Samaritans which will be elaborated in Acts 8:4-25. Notice also the specific mention of the mission to the Samaritans in Acts 1:8.)

Nolland writes of the antagonism between Jews and Samaritans:³³

The origin of the split between the Samaritans and the Jews is shrouded in mystery. Traditionally they have been taken to be the descendants of the mixed population settled in Israel after the Assyrian conquest of the Northern Kingdom (2 Kgs 17:24–41). Probably the breach of which the NT situation is the aftermath is to be dated to the late fourth century B.C., shortly before Alexander the Great. Manasseh, the brother of the high priest married the daughter of the Samaritan Sanballat and was expelled from Jerusalem. He responded by building a temple on Mount Gerizim. In 128 B.C. John Hyrcanus’ destruction of the Gerizim temple created deep and lasting resentment. But it would seem that the Jewish Samaritan break was not complete until into the first century B.C. The Samaritans developed their own form of the Pentateuch (the extent of their canon), their own liturgy, and their own religious literature. The Samaritans were, however, never considered by the Jews simply as non-Jews: their affiliation to the congregation of Israel was never denied, only considered doubtful!

³² Soards *et al*, *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary Year C*, 173.

³³ John Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, vol. 35B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 533–545.

Jesus has his face set towards Jerusalem with its accompanying suffering. Now is not the time for judgment. (There will be coming, however, a time of judgment e.g. 10:12, 14; 13:1–9).

The rebuke of James and John is seen in the context of the journey motif, including in the light of 9:21–50. At Jesus' arrest scene there will be a similar refusal to fight back (22:47–51).

Nolland writes:³⁴

Now in the divine plan the time is fast approaching for Jesus to be taken up. The word used is sometimes a pious way of talking about death, but here, while it embraces Jesus' death in Jerusalem, its focus is clearly on his translation to glory. There is a certain analogy between this prospect for Jesus and what happened to Elijah (see 2 Kgs 2:10–11). Sensing that the time was fast coming, Jesus resolutely sets his face toward Jerusalem.

There is a possible play on the words of Mal 3:1. The messengers prepare for the way of Jesus. They are doing what the Elijah of the end-time would do in preparation for the coming of the Lord. Practically they are also doing what the Seventy will do in 10:1–20.

Despite the refusal of the village, Jesus is not swayed from his following the way, in fact rejection is part of the way. Jesus still continues.

Nolland writes:³⁵

Luke has started the journey with an anticipation of the rejection that awaits Jesus in Jerusalem. Now he will stress that following the Jesus who goes the way of the cross makes radical demands upon all who would contemplate such a course.

Next come three stories of people who would like to follow Jesus. All three brief interactions discuss the radical commitment of following.

The first person is told of the difficulties of following. The second situation is one where Jesus calls upon a person to follow, and builds on the first situation. The call of Jesus and the person's response in the third situation is similar to the call of Elisha, where Elisha is ploughing and asks to say goodbye to his family (1 Kgs 19:19–21).

The harshness of Jesus' words here cannot be softened. The responsibility of care for parents and responsibility to bury them when they die was enshrined in the practices of Israel's society. It was the son's significant religious duty. "The call to leave the dead to bury their own dead (vv 59–60) is such a violation of all ancient versions of filial duty as to be hard to explain outside the context of Jesus' own sense of the compelling urgency of the claims of the kingdom of God."³⁶

³⁴ Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 533–545.

³⁵ Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 533–545.

³⁶ Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 533–545.

Jesus is not denying the importance of care for parents, and dying parents, but he claims that here his call is even more important and pressing, just as the command to bury a relative took precedence over other obligations of the law. Here indeed Jesus is speaking in strong terms (and typical Semitic ways of speaking).

“The force of the words is finally ‘let other arrangements be made; you have more pressing duties.’ If we insist on a literal sense, we have to distinguish between the two references to the dead: let the spiritually dead bury the physically dead, but this seems less satisfactory.”³⁷ The call of Jesus is even more critical than the call of Elijah to Elisha.

Nolland comments on this section:³⁸

Luke begins by reinforcing the Journey to Jerusalem context. Then he consciously organizes the items as a triplet. In the first and third instances, those who address Jesus make the proposal to follow him; in the central episode, Jesus is the one who calls to follow. Only in the central interchange is there a specific formulation of the task that those challenged to follow are called to share in (“proclaim the kingdom of God”). In the opening item Jesus raises the difficulties that stand before the one who would follow. For the remaining two items, it is the one speaking to Jesus who raises the difficulties. In both these last cases the claims of the kingdom of God also are the basis for disallowing the concessions sought.

As we are not told the response to each of the three would-be followers, it causes us to consider our own response to the call of Christ upon our lives. Jesus does not attempt to indicate that discipleship is all roses! The Samaritan village is preparation for Jerusalem.

This passage connects the challenging words of 9:23-27 with the mission ahead and the way of Jesus.

Nolland comments:

The first man had made his own proposal to follow. The second is called to do so by Jesus. He is quite willing to rise to Jesus’ challenge, despite the previous somber words about the Son of Man’s lack of anywhere to lay his head. But the radical nature of the call is to bite yet deeper. The man’s father is dead or on the point of dying. In Jewish tradition (and not only there!), as son, he was considered to have prime responsibility for providing a decent burial. ... Jesus’ words do not deny the normal claims of the pious duty to bury the dead, but, in a way that is harsh and even shocking, they insist that this man has a more pressing duty.

In his words Jesus appeals to the common sentiment that the world of the dead and of the living are, for the most part, spheres sealed off from one another. The father has moved off into the embrace of that other world. Let those who are already there take responsibility as they receive this newcomer. Of course, taken

³⁷ Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 533–545.

³⁸ Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 533–545.

literally as an answer to the man's dilemma it is a piece of nonsense. But it is not to be taken literally. The harsh words are simply to impress upon the man that he has more pressing responsibilities, and that some other arrangements will have to do for the burial of the father. No real concern is expressed about what these other arrangements might be.³⁹

For the Preacher

With regard to vv. 57-62 Nolland writes:

No doubt we would all rather that Jesus not have spoken in this way. And while we feel the challenge of this episode in connection with any kind of postponing of the demands of discipleship, it is very difficult for us to fit this sort of challenge into the kind of society in which most of us believe our discipleship is to be performed. The prophet Ezekiel faced a not dissimilar challenge when he was denied by God the right to mourn the death of his own wife (Ezek 24:15–24). In such words we experience the ultimate contradiction between the kingdom of God and even the best and most Christian of our humanist values.

The third encounter is in many ways a milder rerun of the second. It is a play upon the call of Elisha to be a prophet alongside Elijah and, ultimately, to replace Elijah (1 Kgs 19:19–21). That was an exalted calling, but at that time there was scope for Elisha first to take his departure from his family. This calling, because of the presence of the kingdom of God, goes beyond anything that Elisha would experience (compare Luke 10:23–24). It is more important and it is also more urgent. There is no place here for any hesitation or delay. To do anything other than to move right into the calling would be to behave like the man at the plough who is ploughing his way forward, but looking behind him, and so, loses the line of the furrow. That is not good enough for the kingdom of God! When the demand of God presses upon us, it must take priority over all that belongs to good sense, good citizenship, and good family membership.⁴⁰

The preacher can explore the implications of following Jesus today. What might we have to forgo in order to follow? What are distractions which might keep our eyes off following Jesus and setting our face to the task at hand? Are there places/activities to which we, like Jesus, need to “set our face” (9:51)? How much is our working with God in mission affected by fear of rejection?

Pentecost 6 – Luke 10:38-42 – Mary and Martha

Verse 38 indicates that Jesus is still on his journey towards Jerusalem. This is a time when the disciples are being taught what following means. In this story however Jesus' 12 particular followers are out of view.

³⁹ Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 533–545.

⁴⁰ Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 533–545.

John 11:1-12:8 describes a different scene of Jesus with Mary and Martha. There they are described as the sisters of Lazarus. It is in their home in Bethany where Mary anoints Jesus' feet. Now here in the Lukan account, Jesus is shown hospitality by Martha (v. 38) and yet a strong contrast is drawn between Mary and Martha. Mary takes the position of being at the Lord's feet, a position of submissiveness and desire to listen to Jesus. In Acts 22:3 Luke uses this description of Paul as he was taught by his rabbi Gamaliel. Mary is thus demonstrating a good discipleship position.

Luke 6:47, 8:11, 21, and 11:28 illustrate the importance for a disciple to listen to the word (although these references also add acting on or obeying the word). Later in *Luke* and *Acts* we will see that disciples also need to be actors as well as listeners.

Martha on the other hand is described as being "distracted by her many tasks" (v. 40). It is pertinent to note that "in this period, Jewish women were normally cast in the role of domestic performance in order to support the instruction of men rather than as persons who were themselves engaged in study."⁴¹ Luke here demonstrates his concern for the place of women amongst his active disciples. Here women are entitled to a freedom from their expected roles especially with regard to domestic duties.

Green summarises the scene:⁴²

Though v 38 suggested nothing negative about the nature of Martha's welcome, it is with respect to her hospitality that she is contrasted with Mary. Here and in v 41, she is characterized as one who serves, normally a positive quality in Luke, but whose service is marked by distractions and worry that conflict with the growth and expression of authentic faith (see 8:14; 12:22, 26). Indeed, Martha's address to Jesus takes an unexpected, perhaps unconscious turn; while she engages in the irony of self-betrayal, her attempt to win Jesus' support in a struggle against her sister ends in self-indictment. The nature of hospitality for which Jesus seeks is realized in attending to one's guest, yet Martha's speech is centered on "me"-talk (3 times). Though she refers to Jesus as "Lord," she is concerned to engage his assistance in her plans, not to learn from him his.

Jesus is "Lord," according to the narrator, and this disallows attempts to tie him into the stratagems of others. Instead, his status as Lord identifies him as the one whose design transcends self-oriented or conventionally correct plans and whose message takes precedence over the same. Thus, over against the attempt of Martha to assert the priority of her enterprise over that of her sister, Jesus provides his own two-sided valuation of the scene before him. Martha is engaged in anxious, agitated practices, behavior that contrasts sharply with the comportment of a disciple characteristic of Mary. Martha is concerned with many things, Mary with only one. Hence, Martha's behavior is negatively assessed, Mary's positively. What is this "one thing," this "better part" Mary has chosen? Within this narrative co-text, the infinite range of possibilities is narrowed considerably: She is fixed on the guest, Jesus, and his word; she heeds the one whose presence is commensurate with the coming of the kingdom of God.

⁴¹ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 434-437.

⁴² Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 434-437.

For the Preacher

Green writes:

With Jesus' presence the world is being reconstituted, with the result that (1) Mary (and, with her, those of low status accustomed to living on the margins of society) *need* no longer be defined by socially determined roles; and, more importantly in this co-text, (2) Mary and Martha (and, with them, all) *must* understand and act on the priority of attending to the guest before them, extending to Jesus and his messengers the sort of welcome in which the authentic hearing of discipleship is integral.⁴³

From the context in Luke, this story appears less to be a condemnation of showing hospitality, rather it is a statement of the importance of listening in discipleship of Christ.

How do we evaluate the many concerns in our life which may prevent us spending time with Christ? What does showing hospitality to Christ mean in our lives? What societal norms need to be questioned when it comes to discipleship?

Pentecost 7 – Luke 11:1-13 – Prayer

We move on to a new section in the travel narrative where Jesus is praying 'in a certain place'. One disciple asks him to pray as John taught his disciples. Following this prayer is the parable of the importunate friend at midnight. The context of the "Lord's Prayer" in Matthew 6 is different, being part of the "Sermon on the Mount".

Luke particularly focuses on Jesus in prayer, more so than the other Gospels. Examples are at his baptism (3:21), before choosing the twelve (6:12), before the first prophecy of his passion (9:18) and at his transfiguration (9:28), among others.

It wasn't unusual for rabbis to teach specific prayers to their disciples and here we have Jesus teaching his disciples as John the Baptist had taught his own disciples.

There are two brief petitions of praise and three petitions for those praying. It is a communal prayer. The community's prime desire is for the coming of God's Reign.

How should v. 3 be translated: Is it bread **for today** or bread **for tomorrow**? Does it possibly mean bread from heaven at the final coming of the Reign of God? The fact that the present tense is used suggests constant sustenance in the present. It has been suggested that at a later stage of the community life of the early church that it carried Eucharistic overtones (see also 'breaking the bread' in 24:35 and Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7, 11).

⁴³ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 434–437.

'Father' is the same title as Jesus himself used for God (10:21; 22:42), suggesting an intimate relationship between the disciples and God.⁴⁴

The requests for the Reign and the hallowing of the name are the only things which God can do. (see also 2 Sam 6:2; Jer 7:11; Amos 9:12 for hallowing of the Name, i.e. it is the OT way of referring to God). God would vindicate God's name which had been profaned. Lev 11:46 suggests that the prayer is a wish expressed by the Christian community, the vindication of the holiness of God's name and includes a mode of God's activity to be carried out primarily through Jesus, but also through the disciples.

With the prayer for hallowing and the wish for the Reign we have the expression of the community's praise of God.

The coming then requests daily sustenance, forgiveness and no confrontation with temptation to apostasy.

"Hallowed be your name" means honour, reverence and respect because of who God is. May God's reputation, name, person, and character be kept untarnished, uncontaminated, unsullied. May nothing be done to debase or defame God's record.⁴⁵

Jesus asks his disciples to pray they won't "be brought to the time of trial" (11:4). As we see in *Luke* and *Acts*, neither Jesus nor his disciples will escape testing and persecution. As Tannehill comments: "the answer to this petition comes not in the form of immunity but as strength to endure and recover."⁴⁶

Jesus then continues to teach about prayer by telling a parable. The message doesn't lie in comparing God to a friend who only responds under pressure, but that if your friends answer importunate appeals *how much more* will God who desires to give us the Reign (see 12:32).⁴⁷

The tenses of verbs asking, seeking, knocking are present. In other words, prayers are to be continual.⁴⁸

For the Preacher

This passage provides the preacher with an opportunity to explore the topic of prayer. Jesus invites us to be seeking, knocking and asking in prayer continually. It invites us into a relationship with God that is even closer than a person asking of a friend. This is all in the context of the holiness of God and the plea for God's Reign to be fully present. It also represents our dependence upon the Holy One for our day-to-day living.

⁴⁴ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (X-XXIV)* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1981).

⁴⁵ Keller

⁴⁶ Tannehill, *Luke*, 189.

⁴⁷ Fred B. Craddock, *Luke* (Interpretation Series; Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990).

⁴⁸ Craddock, *Luke*.

Some preachers expand the lesson to cover 2 or more sermons on prayer or specifically on the “Lord’s Prayer”.

Pentecost 8 – Luke 12:13-21 - Parable of the Rich Fool

Interestingly there is a briefer very similar parallel saying in Sirach 11:18-19 about a rich man, his possessions and his death.

The parable is embedded in a wider section on covetousness (12:13-15, 21). Covetousness is prohibited in the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:17//Deut 6:21). The prophets also will denounce it (Mic 2:2).

In v. 15 Jesus warns against “all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” The parable then outlines the stupidity of such greed and further claiming possessions as security.

Jesus appears to have been interrupted in his discussing the deeper things of life by this person whose heart seemed to be focussed on money. It is likely that the enquirer’s brother was present in the crowd. Was the man being materialistic, or was he expressing a desire for justice or was he speaking from human need? Jesus’ response seems to indicate the first. His response of warning against covetousness could have served as a warning to both brothers.

Jesus tells the story of the rich fool who seemed to believe that he could find real happiness in his seeking more and more of earthly abundance. At the climax of his acquiring prosperity his life is sought from him by God in his sudden death. The rich fool had thought that he had full control over his life. Everything was self-focussed: “my barns ... my goods ... my soul” (vv. 18, 19). Geldenhuys writes:⁴⁹ “Such is the fatal end of everyone who is spiritually dead while gathering earthly treasures and who does not primarily and above all take heed that he [*sic*] is rich in God, spiritually rich through living in close communion with Him and faithfully serving Him.”

Jesus is not disapproving of possessions *per se* but the wrongful attitude towards them. The piling up of unneeded possessions will detract from honouring God and neighbour. It becomes a false sense of security which focuses on the possessions themselves. As 9:25 has already pointed out, what will it profit someone if they gain the whole world and in the process lose their life? As we have already seen, in *Luke/Acts* there is much emphasis on wealth being shared.⁵⁰

For the Preacher

If things detract from our focus on God we lose sight of what is important. Sharing of wealth is to be sought and dedication to the service of the Reign of God is what is to be honoured.

⁴⁹ Geldenhuys, *Luke*, 355.

⁵⁰ Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 141.

Pentecost 9 – Luke 12:32-40 – Coming of the Son of Man

Verse 32 follows closely from vv. 29-31. Here Jesus has urged his followers to understand that God knows we need certain things, but to strive for the Reign of God and “these things” will be given you as well.

And so vv. 32-34 discuss the place of treasure in God’s Reign. Jesus now refers to his followers as “little flock” and urges them not to be afraid. God’s will is clear for them in the gift of the Reign. Such living under the reign of God does not necessarily imply wealth. Indeed Jesus urges the disciples to sell their possessions and give to the needy. Their treasure, where their heart lies, should be in the divine sphere.

Green writes:⁵¹

The nature of this kingdom-service is spelled out clearly in this co-text, demonstrating that the kingdom of God is not only a gift but also an obligation. Rather than being occupied with the buildup of treasures with an eye to self-security in this life (v 21), disciples need to be concerned with ensuring that they possess treasures in heaven. Therefore, seeking the kingdom (v 31) is tantamount to setting one’s heart on the kingdom (v 34), and the consequence of this orientation of life is a heavenly treasure that is neither subject to the exigencies of earthly existence nor endangered by the unexpected intervention of God.

Such giving on behalf of the follower of Jesus does not expect pay-back - something which runs counter to the societal norms of the day. Giving is not to place others in debt.

Throughout the entire chapter, Jesus has expounded on the *theme* of watchfulness: with respect to persecution (vv. 1–12), possessions (vv. 13–35), and, now, more generally, faithfulness within God’s community.

Green writes of the use of metaphor in vv. 35-40:⁵²

The entirety of this section is set within the metaphorical field of the Roman household (*domus*) or family (*familia*), with particular emphasis on master/lord-slave relations. The move back and forth between direct and more parabolic instruction complicates how the function of these metaphors may be perceived, however. In particular, the problem of distinguishing between a metaphor’s virtual properties and those properties actualized within this co-text is a pressing one. For example, although the portrait of the returning master who serves his faithful servants does not depend on an identification of the “master/lord” with Jesus, (1) it does nonetheless articulate with the topsy-turvy world Jesus has otherwise addressed in his message, (2) this identification will be made by Jesus later in the narrative (22:26–27), and (3) in the current co-text Jesus is identified as “Lord” by both Peter (v 41) and the narrator (v 42). Again, the importance of constant

⁵¹ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 494–502.

⁵² Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 494–502.

vigilance does not require that one identify Jesus with the “thief” of v 39; the point of the observation contained in v 39 competently serves to add a note of urgency to the admonition to readiness regarding the unexpected coming of the Son of Man without appeal to this form of allegory. A third example of the problem of determining the reach of Jesus’ metaphorical arsenal lies in the importance he allots to the role of “steward” (“manager”) in v 42; the identification of a person serving in this capacity suits its local co-text well, but it may take on added meaning when contrasted with the wealthy landowner/farmer of Jesus’ earlier parable, who failed to recognize his role as a custodian of God’s good gifts (v 20; ...). Though such ambiguity opens the door to a number of possible readings of this segment of Jesus’ discourse, the basic issues with which Jesus is concerned remain clearly defined.

As in other parables, the ones who are blessed are those more on the underside of life, here the servants/slaves of the household. Now it is the lord/master of the household who will bless those who serve. Thus, as Mary has foretold in 1:52, the humble are exalted and societal norms are overturned.

Now the followers are asked to stay alert and ready for action as they await the Lord’s return. They are assured that the Lord *will* come, but *the timing* may be unexpected. May the Lord find us working when Christ returns!

Be dressed and ready for action (v. 35) translates the Greek which can more literally be translated “let your loins be girded”. This is how the Israelites were told to eat the Passover in Exod 12:11 as they prepared to leave Egypt. Always be on the ready for their salvation, and their readiness includes readiness for the work of serving in God’s Reign.

Green describes the banquet comparison:⁵³

Jesus’ story centers on a banquet scene that draws together three important elements from the wider Lukan perspective on meals. First, and most obvious in this co-text, the master provides a meal for the faithful, just as Jesus had promised in his portrait of the kingdom in vv 22–31. Whatever else the meal setting might serve, it is most obviously a place for eating—no small matter in the context of the proclamation of good news for the marginalized (see ... 4:18–19) and in light of the perspective on life sanctioned by Jesus in vv 13–34. Second, working within the lines of an important stream of end-time thinking in Judaism as well as in Luke-Acts, Jesus situates his concern for vigilance within the eschatological framework of anticipation of the heavenly banquet.

Third, as is the case elsewhere in Luke-Acts, so here the table provides the setting for Jesus’ self-revelation. In this case, a scene that otherwise reflects household norms—slaves awaiting the arrival of their lord—actually subverts the basis of the slave system. The master undergoes a status reversal, so that he engages in slavish activity on behalf of slaves. This means that the vigilant no longer have the status of slaves, though Jesus does not push so far as to portray them now as masters. Instead, he seems to posit in the place of common

⁵³ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 494–502.

household conventions governed by a hyperconcern with status consciousness the household of God, characterized by blindness with respect to issues of status and the roles that attend them. Here, mutual service is the order of the day. On the one hand, this surprising end to the story might be understood as nothing more (or less) than an embodiment of the message of Jesus as this has been proclaimed since the onset of his public ministry.⁷⁹ In addition, Jesus' parable can be read in a self-referential way, in which he presents himself as the lord who serves the faithful; in fact, this is exactly how Jesus speaks of himself to his disciples at their last meal together (22:24–27). Either way, it is important to realize that Jesus' message goes beyond any attempt to establish the parameters of a new social order. Instead, Jesus provides for his audience a vision of the eschaton, of a household reality wherein hierarchies of status are nullified; with this vision he both declares the nature of the reward awaiting the faithful and alerts his audience to the nature of fidelity in the interim *and in the eschaton*.

In vv. 39 and 40 the image changes. This new scene is not to be allegorized, rather it simply makes the point that the arrival of Christ will be as sudden as the arrival of a thief and again there is therefore another call for watchfulness and readiness.

For the Preacher

There are many possibilities for launching a sermon from this passage. The preacher may wish to explore God's "good pleasure" to grant the kingdom as gift (v. 32). What implications do vv. 33-34 have for how we live our lives, as individuals, as church, as society? How are we to be prepared in action as we await the return of Christ?