

# **PENTECOST SEASON WORSHIP PLANNING GUIDE**

## **YEAR C**

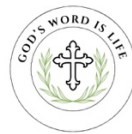
### **SECTION TWO OF ORDINARY TIME**



**Proper 13 through Proper 20**

**July - August, 2025**

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**GOD'S WORD IS LIFE**

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## INTRODUCTION TO PENTECOST SECTION TWO: THE WAY DOWN IS THE WAY HOME

The readings in this stretch of Ordinary Time are anything but ordinary. Week after week, the lectionary hands us hard truths wrapped in strange stories: crooked managers, golden calves, Sabbath confrontations, unjust scales, sheep gone missing. They speak with fire and tenderness. They strike the nerve of human striving. And together, they form a consistent, cruciform theme: God meets us not in our strength, but in our weakness. Not in our virtue, but in our need.

This is the thread running through these texts—a thread the world resists and the old self rejects: God is not found at the top of the ladder but at the bottom. The wisdom of Proverbs counsels humility in the court of the powerful. The prophet Amos thunders against those who build their lives by exploiting the poor. Jesus welcomes sinners and tells parables that end not with moral clarity, but with mercy for those who didn't earn it. Paul calls himself the chief of sinners, not as a throwaway line, but as the very reason Christ's grace is credible.

These are not moral tales designed to whip us into shape. They are *revelations*—uncoverings of who God truly is and how He works in the world. And what they reveal is this: God chooses the low place. The place of confession, of emptiness, of surrender.

The theology of glory says: climb higher. Manage better. Earn your seat.

But the theology of the cross says: you are already dead—and in Christ, you are already raised.

So, Jesus tells the crowds to count the cost—not because salvation is expensive, but because the cross strips away every illusion we have about securing ourselves. He tells us that we cannot serve both God and mammon—not as a threat, but as a mercy. He wants to free us from the exhausting lie that life is found in possession or performance.

In these texts, God is not calling us to become better versions of ourselves. He is *crucifying the old self* altogether, and raising something new—by grace.

What emerges across these weeks is a theology that dares to say:

- The lowest seat is where the Gospel finds you.
- The debt is forgiven before it is repaid.
- The prayer is heard before it is worthy.
- The sinner is sought out before he can repent.
- The mercy is given while we are still lost.

And so the invitation in these weeks is not to try harder, but to listen more deeply to the Word that exposes, unburdens, and finally restores because the one who speaks it is the same one who carried a cross for you—who bore your debts, who served you at the table, who now welcomes you not as a stranger, but as a brother, a sister, a guest of grace.

This is the way of the cross. It is downward. But it is also the way home.

Pastor Mark Anderson

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## COMMENTARIES ON THE READINGS

### PROPER 13

#### Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12–14; 2:18–23

"Vanity of vanities," the Preacher says—"everything is vanity." Not in the modern sense of being self-absorbed, but in the older, deeper sense: all of it is vapor. Fleeting. Untouchable. You think you're building something solid, but when you reach to grasp it, your hands come back empty. It's smoke.

What's striking is that this preacher isn't writing from failure. He's not bitter because life has gone wrong. No—he has had it all: wisdom, accomplishment, success. And that's exactly the point. He's saying, "I made it to the top, and there's nothing up here but wind."

This is hard for us to hear, because we live by the assumption that life *can* be secured—by effort, planning, legacy. We labor to prove ourselves, to leave something behind. But the Preacher doesn't play along. You work and worry, and in the end someone else gets it—maybe a fool. It is an unmasking of the idol of work, the idol of permanence.

But this isn't hopelessness. It's honest preparation. The God who meets us in this space does not demand more from our labor—he comes not to redeem our legacy, but to crucify our illusions. Ecclesiastes isn't nihilism; it's repentance. It's the holy undoing of every false ground we stand on. It's the beginning of the kind of faith that can finally rest—not in our striving, but in a God who saves us apart from it.

#### Colossians 3:1–11

"If you have been raised with Christ..." Paul writes. But then he doesn't follow with a list of virtues to strive for. He goes deeper: "You have died." You *already* have died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

This is not advice. It's not even an invitation. It's *announcement*. The old self—the part of you that believes life is in getting ahead, defending your worth, gathering more, envying what others have—that self has already been put to death in baptism. You don't have to feed it anymore. You don't have to obey it.

That's why Paul can now say, "Put to death... whatever belongs to your earthly nature." Not because you must earn a higher spiritual life, but because those things no longer own you. The cross has already rendered judgment on them.

And now, in Christ, a new self is being formed—not a better version of your old self, but a new creation entirely. One that is no longer driven by fear or comparison. One that does not need to justify itself. This new life is hidden—meaning it does not announce itself with success or status. It is quiet. Cruciform. And that's what makes it real.

So Paul does not call us to improve ourselves. He calls us to *believe what has already happened*: You are dead, and your life is now hidden in Christ. Live from *that*.

### **Luke 12:13–21**

The man comes to Jesus with a perfectly reasonable request: "Tell my brother to divide the inheritance." It's the kind of dispute most of us have known up close—family tensions, estate drama, who gets what. But Jesus refuses to play the judge. Instead, he tells a parable.

There's a man with an abundant harvest—so much grain that he runs out of room. It's a good problem to have. So he tears down the old barns and builds bigger ones. He doesn't cheat, doesn't steal, doesn't harm anyone. He just wants to secure his future. "Soul," he says, "you have ample goods stored up. Relax. Eat. Drink. Be merry."

But God says, "Fool." Not because the man is rich, but because he's wrong about what life is. He thinks he owns his time. He thinks his soul can be protected with careful planning and smart storage. But that night, the illusion collapses. Death exposes what grain cannot secure.

We know this man. He lives in our anxious saving, our fear of scarcity, our addiction to control. He's in every spreadsheet that promises peace of mind and every subtle belief that more—just a little more—will finally allow us to rest.

But Jesus does not leave us there. The gospel breaks in with a different security: not one built on barns, but on a cross. There is one who gave everything away, who became poor for our sake, who opened his own storehouse to give us a life that cannot rot or rust or be taken away.

To be “rich toward God” is not about giving more—it's about being given to. It is to hear the voice of Christ say: You are not a fool. You are mine. Your life is not in what you store. It is in who holds you.

## PROPER 14

### Genesis 15:1–6

“Abram, do not be afraid.”

That’s how the Lord begins, not with demands but with comfort. And it’s not abstract. God speaks into Abram’s *actual fear*—the deep ache of disappointment. Abram has been following the promise for years now. He’s walked through famine and war, through desert and doubt, and he’s still childless. “What will you give me?” he asks, not defiantly, but honestly. He is tired. He has questions. He has no heir. The promise seems suspended in the air, weightless, unreal.

And the Lord answers—not by fixing it all at once, not with immediate fulfillment, but with a Word: “Look toward heaven and count the stars... So shall your descendants be.” It’s an impossible image, offered in the middle of barrenness. And Abram believes it. That’s all. He believes. And that faith is *counted to him as righteousness*.

This is one of the clearest moments in Scripture where God declares that righteousness is not achieved—it is *given*. Not based on what Abram does, but on what God *says*. This is not a transaction. It is a gift. Faith itself is not the ladder we climb to get to God—it is the empty hand receiving the promise.

This passage is pure Gospel. God justifies the ungodly. He binds Himself to the barren. He gives a future where none is visible. And all He asks is trust—which itself is sustained by the Word He speaks. If your future looks bleak, if your work feels fruitless, if the promise seems far off, this is your text. The same God still speaks. And He does not lie.\

### Hebrews 11:1–3, 8–16

“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

It’s a beautiful line, but we misunderstand it if we treat faith like some inner spiritual confidence. The writer of Hebrews doesn’t describe faith as clarity or certainty. He shows us faith by telling stories—people who *did not receive* the things promised, and yet kept walking toward them.



Abraham went out, not knowing where he was going. Sarah laughed before she believed. These people lived in tents. They died with promises still in God's hands. And yet they trusted—not because they were strong, but because God had spoken.

That's the shape of faith: not triumphant, but tethered. Not rooted in what we can measure, but in the trustworthiness of the One who calls us. God's promise gives faith its shape and its substance.

This isn't about nostalgia for a past, or desperation to control the present. It's about hope that runs ahead of what we can see. A forward-facing, promise-born, cross-anchored hope. And it's not vague. The text says they were "seeking a better country"—a home not built by human hands, but by God.

That's the heart of it. We are not called to build our own heavenly city, or create a world secure enough to rest in. We are called to live as those who know this world—this broken, beautiful, groaning world—is not the end of the story. There is a homeland prepared. And the builder is not us.

That's the good news. You don't have to make your faith impressive. You don't have to finish the journey. The promise is already true, and God is not ashamed to call you His own.

### **Luke 12:32–40**

"Do not be afraid, little flock."

That's how it starts. And everything else flows from that Word. Do not be afraid—not because you are in control, but because *you are not*. And still—"it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

That line alone dismantles every economy of merit, every religion of anxiety. The Father doesn't trade. He *gives*. Not reluctantly, not out of pity, but from His good pleasure. That's grace. Not just pardon for the guilty—but delight in giving to the undeserving.

So when Jesus says "Sell your possessions," he's not launching a stewardship campaign. He's naming what it looks like to be free. You can let go of what you were clinging to, because the kingdom is already yours.

Then he shifts the image again: “Be dressed for action. Keep your lamps lit.” At first glance it sounds like pressure—stay alert or else. But that’s not the punchline. The punchline is the *Master* who returns and does something absurd. He *serves* the servants. He puts on the apron. He sits them down. He becomes host.

This is no ordinary master. This is the Lord who comes not to judge with terror, but to kneel in love. The one who washes feet. The one who serves bread. The one who gives His body and blood.

So yes, be awake—not because God is dangerous, but because grace is near. Be alert—not in fear, but in readiness to receive.

You don’t need to clutch your coins, or calculate your legacy, or hoard your righteousness. The kingdom is given. The table is set. The Master is coming—and when He comes, He will serve.

That’s the kind of Lord we have. And that’s why we can stop being afraid.

## PROPER 15

### Jeremiah 23:23–29

“Am I a God near by, says the LORD, and not a God far off?”

This is no abstract question. Jeremiah is confronting the religious professionals of his day—those who have watered down God’s Word, who speak visions from their own minds, who offer soft dreams instead of hard truth. They say “peace, peace” when there is no peace. They turn prophecy into therapy.

But God is not interested in flattery. He does not bless delusion. His Word is not a private insight. It is fire. It is hammer. It breaks rocks and falsehoods.

That’s hard for us to hear. We want God’s Word to soothe. But often, it must *undo* before it builds. The Word of God comes not to reinforce our illusions but to crucify them.

And the terrifying part? These false prophets still use God’s name. “I have dreamed,” they say. And God says, “Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let the one who has my word speak it faithfully.”

There’s a deep distinction here between speech that pleases and speech that *reveals*. God’s Word doesn’t merely echo what we already believe. It interrupts. It kills before it makes alive. It lays bare before it clothes in mercy.

This is not a tame God. And thank God for that. Because if we are to be saved, we must first be told the truth—not our version of it, but God’s. And when that Word comes, it won’t leave us unchanged.

### Hebrews 11:29—12:2

There is something relentless about this passage—a litany of people who lived and died by faith. Some passed through seas. Some conquered kingdoms. Others were tortured, imprisoned, sawn in two. They were destitute, afflicted, mistreated—“of whom the world was not worthy.”

This is not a Hall of Fame. It is a testimony to the unseen. None of them received the fullness of what was promised. But they trusted the One who had promised.

And then the author turns it toward us: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses...”

This isn’t a call to admire their faith. It’s a summons to run the same race—with eyes fixed not on our own resolve, but on *Jesus*. He is the pioneer and perfecter. The beginner and finisher. The one who *endured the cross, scorning its shame*.

Notice the movement here: from those who walked in shadows, to the one who walked into death itself. From those commended for their trust, to the one in whom all trust is fulfilled.

This is the theology of the cross, not of glory. Faith does not guarantee comfort. It guarantees participation in Christ’s path. And that path is through suffering. Through loss. Through death.

But the promise is unshaken: Jesus has already run the race. Already endured the shame. Already taken His seat. And now, He is not only the one we follow—He is the one who *keeps us in the race*.

Let us run, not because we are strong, but because the One who was crucified now lives—and He does not run away from us.

### **Luke 12:49–56**

This is one of the most jarring moments in the Gospel:

“Do you think I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.”

It shocks us—because we’ve domesticated Jesus. We’ve made Him the gentle moral teacher, the kind-hearted reconciler. And yes, He is the Prince of Peace. But His peace comes by way of the cross—not by consensus.

The division He brings is not arbitrary. It is the unavoidable consequence of the Word being spoken into the world. Light divides from darkness. Truth divides from illusion. The Word is not neutral. It exposes. It judges. It *burns*.

“I came to bring fire to the earth,” Jesus says. And that fire is His own suffering. “I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed!” He is speaking of the cross—the place where judgment and mercy meet, where the fire of God’s wrath consumes sin in the body of His own Son.

Jesus does not divide in order to hurt, but because the truth always divides. The cross reveals what cannot be shared between the old age and the new. Between self-justification and mercy. Between our peacekeeping and His real peace.

This is not the Jesus we put on greeting cards. But this is the Jesus who saves us. The one who loves us enough to unsettle, to provoke, to burn away what cannot endure.

He is not against the world. But He is against its illusions. And He will not leave them standing.

## PROPER 16

### Isaiah 58:9b–14

“If you remove the yoke...”

This passage is often read as moral exhortation—and it is. But if we stop there, we miss the heart of it. God is not simply telling us to *do better*. He is naming what must die in us so that life can be given.

The people of Israel were observing fasts and rituals. They were outwardly pious. But their lives remained untouched by mercy. They bowed their heads, but they trampled the poor. They offered prayers, but spoke with venom.

God is not fooled by religious theater. The fast He chooses is always one that breaks chains—chains of injustice, oppression, selfishness. Isaiah paints a picture of what it looks like when that Word breaks through: the hungry fed, the afflicted lifted, and—remarkably—the people themselves restored. “Your gloom will be like the noonday... You shall be like a watered garden.”

But notice: this is not the result of spiritual effort. It is the fruit of a new direction. Of repentance. Of returning. God’s Word here is promise: *If you turn back... I will make you ride upon the heights.*

It’s not that God is withholding blessing until we behave. It’s that the blessings of God—healing, rest, delight—*can’t coexist* with self-absorption and injustice. He does not call us to earn anything. He calls us to *be turned*, so that we may receive what He already longs to give.

That is always how the Word works: it exposes what’s false in us, in order to heal. It breaks down our self-made piety, and in its place gives the sabbath joy of a people who know they belong to the God who sets the captives free.

### Hebrews 12:18–29

“You have not come to what may be touched...”

The writer of Hebrews contrasts two mountains: Sinai, where the Law was given in terror, and Zion, where the Gospel has been given in Christ. Sinai was full of fear: fire, darkness, trumpet blasts. Even Moses trembled. But *you*—the church—you have come to Mount Zion.

This is not about geography. It's about covenant. About what kind of God we are dealing with. The old covenant came with warnings and distance. The new comes with invitation. You have come to the city of the living God, to festal assembly, to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word.

That phrase—a *better word*—is everything. The blood of Abel cried out for justice, for vengeance. The blood of Christ cries out for mercy.

But then comes the warning: “See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking.” Because even grace has weight. Even mercy is not trivial. Our God is not a tame deity. He is still a consuming fire. And the shaking isn't over.

“Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven.” The writer is quoting Haggai, describing how God will remove what is perishable so that what is *unshakable* may remain. That's not meant to terrify us—it's meant to reorient us. Because the kingdom we have received cannot be shaken.

This is not sentiment. This is a God who brings the Law to its end *in Christ*, and then gives us something more solid than Sinai ever offered: a crucified, risen, reigning Christ whose mercy cannot be moved.

So the proper response is awe. Gratitude. Reverence. Not fear of punishment, but wonder at the unshakable gift we've been given.

### **Luke 13:10–17**

“She had been bent over for eighteen years...”

Jesus sees her. That's the first thing. She doesn't call out. She doesn't ask for healing. But He sees her. And He calls her forward. “Woman, you are set free from your ailment.” No conditions. No prerequisites. Just a Word.

He touches her, and immediately she stands upright. And then she does what healed people do—she praises God.

But not everyone rejoices. The synagogue leader is indignant—not because he hates healing, but because it happened on the wrong day. There is always something scandalous about grace when it refuses to wait its turn.

Jesus exposes the hypocrisy: “You untie your ox or donkey on the Sabbath... Should not this woman... be set free?” The logic is simple. And crushing. If we’re more concerned with property than people, more invested in rule-keeping than liberation, we have not understood the Law at all.

This is the kind of moment that defines Jesus’ ministry. He doesn’t abolish the Sabbath. He fulfills it. Because the Sabbath is *for* rest, *for* restoration. And that is exactly what happens when Jesus speaks.

This isn’t just a healing story. It’s a Gospel story. A picture of what happens when the Word breaks in. The woman is not just physically restored—she is *publicly seen*. Her shame is lifted. Her worth is affirmed.

And the crowd? They rejoice. Because real healing doesn’t just make people feel better. It *shifts the atmosphere*. It interrupts what we thought we knew about how God works.

And it always leaves us standing upright—because the Word of Christ never leaves us bowed.



## PROPER 17

### Proverbs 25:6–7

“Do not put yourself forward in the king’s presence.”

At first glance, this sounds like basic wisdom—good advice for navigating social situations: don’t presume too much; wait to be invited. But beneath that surface is something deeper. The wisdom here echoes the pattern of the kingdom of God, where the exalted are brought low, and the lowly are lifted up.

In God’s economy, pride isn’t just socially awkward—it’s spiritually dangerous. Self-promotion, self-assertion, ladder-climbing—all of it is based on the assumption that we must prove our worth. But the Gospel undoes this. It says the highest seat is not seized; it’s given.

We’re not told to grovel—but to wait. To take the lower place. Not because it guarantees reward, but because the lower place is where grace meets us. The proud push forward. The faithful wait for the Word: “Come up higher.”

That Word is the key. It’s not status that saves. It’s being *spoken to* by the One who has authority to lift us. And that Word has already been spoken in Christ. He took the lowest seat—the cross—and now calls us up, not by merit, but by mercy.

### Hebrews 13:1–8, 15–16

This passage is the closing exhortation of Hebrews—short, sharp reminders of what Christian life looks like once we’ve heard the Gospel. But don’t miss the order: these are *not* the means by which we enter the kingdom. They are the fruit of having received a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

“Let mutual love continue.” Not: start loving so that God will love you—but: God has already spoken the better Word in Christ, so *continue* in love. That love shows up in practical ways: welcoming strangers, visiting prisoners, honoring marriage, rejecting greed. These aren’t rules to perform—they are marks of a life that’s been set free.

Especially striking is the call to contentment. “Be content with what you have, for he has said, ‘I will never leave you or forsake you.’” That’s the foundation. Not economic peace, but the promise of presence.

Then we hear this: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” That’s not nostalgia. That’s anchoring. The Jesus who bore your sin is still bearing you. The Jesus who rose is still reigning. And that constancy gives shape to the final exhortation: “Through him, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise... and do not neglect to do good and share what you have.”

Notice: the sacrifices are now praise, mercy, generosity—not because God needs them, but because our neighbor does. And they are all “through him.” Never apart from Christ. Always in the overflow of what He’s already done.

The shape of the Christian life, in the end, is not self-improvement. It’s mercy made visible.

#### **Luke 14:1, 7–14**

Jesus is at dinner, and He’s watching. He sees how the guests pick their places. It’s human nature—we all look for status, for validation, for proof that we belong.

But Jesus doesn’t just critique their manners. He tells a parable. And like all His parables, it breaks things open. “When you are invited, do not sit in the place of honor...”

The story seems polite at first. But then it shifts: *someone else more distinguished has been invited*. That line carries weight. The honored guest is always someone else. In the presence of true glory, we are always displaced.

Jesus is not handing out social advice. He is revealing the logic of the kingdom. “Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and everyone who humbles himself will be exalted.”

This is not a spiritual game where we pretend to be lowly so we can later be lifted. It is a call to *let go* of the whole game. To abandon the scoreboard. Because the truth is, in God’s house, none of us earns the place we receive.

Then Jesus turns to His host and speaks even more directly. “When you give a banquet, don’t invite your friends, relatives, or rich neighbors—invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.”

Why? Because they can’t pay you back. And that’s the point. That is the shape of grace: giving without return, offering what cannot be repaid. That’s how God works. And that’s what makes it holy.

The cross is the ultimate banquet where only the undeserving are seated—where Christ feeds us not because we earned a place, but because He took the lowest seat for our sake.

If we want to know what the kingdom looks like, it looks like *that* table.

## PROPER 18

### Deuteronomy 30:15–20

“See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity.”

Moses is standing before the people at the edge of the land, but the weight in his voice is not geographic—it’s existential. This is a Word from the Lord about choice, covenant, and consequence. On the surface, it reads like a stark binary: obey and live, turn away and perish. But if we hear only that, we miss the deeper current.

This is not the voice of a god waiting to see if we measure up. This is the Word of the One who has already chosen His people—already delivered them, already made covenant with them—and now pleads: “Choose life.”

Even this choosing is not left to our strength. Notice the verbs: “The Lord will bless you... The Lord is your life.” The invitation is not to earn God’s favor but to dwell in it. Choosing life here means trusting the God who already chose *you*.

But make no mistake—the call is real. The Law always puts us to death first, because it exposes what we worship. And we are not good at choosing life. That’s why this passage prepares the ground for Christ—the one who is not just the giver of life but *the life Himself*.

In Him, the impossible choice is fulfilled. The curse is borne. The blessing is secured. He is our obedience. He is our future. He is the Yes to our No.

So this ancient word still speaks—but now as promise: “Choose life”—and in Christ, life has already chosen you.

### Philemon 1–21

This is Paul’s most personal letter, and in many ways, his most subversive. It doesn’t shout—it leans in close. A former slave, Onesimus, is returning to his master, Philemon. But Paul doesn’t write with apostolic thunder. He appeals. “Though I am bold enough to command you... yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love.”

That's everything. Love, not coercion. Freedom, not force. Paul is not undermining Philemon's rights—he's inviting him into a new reality.

He says, in effect: "You once had this man as a slave. Now, receive him as a *brother*." The cross has changed everything. No longer slave or free. In Christ, that line doesn't hold. The Gospel is reordering the household.

This is not sentiment—it's risk. For Philemon to receive Onesimus as a brother means letting go of control. It means bearing the cost of what was owed. And it means living in the vulnerability of forgiveness.

Paul, for his part, stands in the middle. He says, "If he owes you anything, charge it to me." That is Christ-shaped speech. That is the Gospel in miniature. The one who was free takes the place of the debtor. The one who could command chooses instead to mediate.

What we see here is not Paul trying to win a favor. We see the Gospel working itself out in real time—in households, in power structures, in hearts.

We do not know how Philemon responds. But that's the point. The Gospel always leaves a question in our hands: Now that you've been set free, how will you use your freedom?

### **Luke 14:25–33**

This is not a comforting passage. It doesn't smooth things over. It cuts. "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother... cannot be my disciple."

We try to soften this—"hate" must mean something else. But Jesus isn't speaking for shock value. He is naming what discipleship actually costs: everything.

This is not about emotion. It's about allegiance. About who holds the final claim on your life.

Jesus is not building a fan club. He's calling people to follow Him into death. And He won't do it under false pretenses. That's why He tells two parables—about a builder and a king. Count the cost, He says. Don't start unless you know what you're getting into.

The strange thing is: most of us don't count the cost—at least not fully. And when we do, we falter. Because if discipleship depends on us paying the price, we are lost.

But here's the Gospel inside the warning: the One who says, "You must give up all your possessions," is the very One who gave up everything for us.

The One who bears the cross is not calling us to carry what He has not already borne.

Discipleship begins with death—not just ours, but His. He has counted the cost. He has paid the price. And now He calls us to walk with Him—not as heroes, but as those who have nothing to lose.

So yes, the call is radical. But the gift is deeper still: you are not your own. You belong to the One who gave His all—and who now gives Himself to you, again and again.

## PROPER 19

### Exodus 32:7–14

The people couldn't wait. That's how this starts. Moses is on the mountain, and they grow restless—so they make a god they *can see*, a god they *can carry*, a god they *can control*. The golden calf is not just idolatry—it's anxiety in action.

And God sees it. “Go down,” He says to Moses, “your people... have acted perversely.” The tone is sharp. God is ready to let them go, ready to start over with Moses alone. It sounds like judgment—but also like heartbreak.

And then something extraordinary happens. Moses stands in the breach—not with excuses, not with blame, but with a plea rooted in God's own promise. “Turn from your wrath... remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel.” He doesn't appeal to Israel's merit (they have none). He appeals to God's *character*.

And then this quiet, astonishing line: “And the Lord changed His mind...”

This is not divine moodiness. It's covenant mercy. God is not a machine. He hears intercession. He keeps His promise, even when we break ours. And Moses—flawed Moses—is the Christ-shaped figure here. He stands between wrath and ruin. He pleads on behalf of sinners.

And this is the Gospel: God hears such prayers. God *remembers* His promises. He does not abandon His people to the idols they make. The cross will show just how far He is willing to go to keep that Word.

### 1 Timothy 1:12–17

“I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, a man of violence...”

Paul never gets over grace. He doesn't tell his story to glorify his past—it's the opposite. He lays out his guilt in full view so that there's no confusion: *Christ came to save sinners. Full stop.*

And then he says, “I am the foremost.” Not *was*. Not “back then.” *I am* the chief of sinners. For Paul, grace isn’t something that happened once—it’s ongoing. It holds him in the present tense.

This is so important. We often try to move past our brokenness, to get on with the business of being good Christians. But Paul stays rooted in the scandal: **“The grace of our Lord overflowed for me...”**

That’s the Gospel: not measured mercy, but overflowing grace. Not given to the worthy, but to the violent, the arrogant, the lost. Christ doesn’t come for the healthy. He comes for the sick.

And Paul’s story becomes a template: *“for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me... Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience.”*

That’s the point. Not that Paul got it right, but that Christ *held him anyway*.

It all crescendos in doxology: “To the King of the ages... be honor and glory.” Grace always ends in praise—not because we become impressive, but because Christ remains patient.

### **Luke 15:1–10**

“This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

That’s the complaint. And it’s exactly right. Jesus does what no respectable rabbi would do—He dines with the wrong people, and He does so without apology. The Pharisees grumble, but Jesus responds with stories.

First: a shepherd loses one sheep. He leaves the ninety-nine to go after the one. Second: a woman loses one coin. She turns the house upside-down to find it. In both cases, there is a search. In both, joy explodes when the lost is found.

Notice the movement: the shepherd doesn’t wait for the sheep to return. The woman doesn’t hope the coin rolls back. God goes. God searches. God rejoices.



This isn't about the virtue of the lost. It's about the relentlessness of the Finder. That's the Gospel: repentance is not our way back to God—it is being found by the One who never gave up searching.

And the joy? It belongs to heaven. “There is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents...” This is not tolerance. This is celebration. God is not embarrassed to love the unworthy. He rejoices to do it.

These stories confront us. They name the fear behind all our religious striving: that if we stop trying, we'll be forgotten. But Jesus tells us the opposite. You are not the hero of your salvation. You are the sheep on His shoulders. The coin in His hand. The cause of heaven's joy.

And all of it begins with this: “This man welcomes sinners.” Thanks be to God.

## PROPER 20

### Amos 8:4–7

“Hear this, you that trample on the needy...”

Amos doesn’t warm up. He delivers the Word like a hammer. And it strikes the very places we often defend: our buying, our selling, our calculating. These merchants are religious people—they’re observing the new moon and the sabbath, but *waiting for it to be over* so they can get back to business. They cannot worship without scheming.

And what’s worse? They cheat in the name of efficiency. They shrink the measure, inflate the price, fix the scales. And the poor? They’re just another commodity to be bought and sold.

God sees all of this. And God is not silent. “I will never forget any of their deeds.”

This is not just economic critique—it’s theological. To exploit the poor is to forget who God is. The Lord who brought Israel out of slavery hears the cries of the oppressed. Always.

This Word doesn’t let us look away. It confronts us with our own economies of convenience. And it asks: Whose suffering is hidden beneath your comfort?

But this is not condemnation for its own sake. The Law exposes our injustice *so that* we might repent. The hammer breaks open space for mercy. And the God who “remembers their deeds” is also the God who, in Christ, remembers His mercy. That’s our hope—not in balanced scales, but in grace undeserved and freely given.

### 1 Timothy 2:1–7

Paul begins not with strategy but with prayer. “First of all, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made...” And not just for friends or fellow believers—but “for kings and all who are in high positions.”

This feels strange—especially when the leaders aren’t just or moral. But Paul isn’t calling for political naiveté. He’s calling for freedom—the kind that comes when we entrust even rulers to God.

And then Paul gives the reason: because God desires *all* people to be saved. That’s the heartbeat behind this text. The scope of God’s mercy is not narrow. It is scandalously wide.

This is not universalism. It’s God’s longing. The same longing that sent Christ as a ransom for all. “There is one God; there is also one mediator... Christ Jesus, himself human...”

That line matters. Christ himself human. Not distant. Not abstract. But embodied. Crucified. Given.

The church prays for the world—not because the world deserves it, but because Christ has claimed it. We pray for those in power—not because they are just, but because we have a just Mediator.

So our prayers are not a performance. They are participation in God’s desire. When we intercede, we are echoing the Gospel: Christ has died for sinners. For rulers. For all.

### **Luke 16:1–13**

This is one of Jesus’ strangest parables—a dishonest manager commended by his master. It leaves us uneasy. Are we meant to admire fraud? Celebrate clever corruption?

But slow down. This is a parable about urgency and trust. The manager sees the writing on the wall. He’s losing his job, and he acts quickly—not to save his position, but to create *mercy* for himself. He reduces debts. He forgives what isn’t his.

And the master, rather than rebuking him, commends him for his shrewdness. Why? Because the manager recognized something we often forget: The time is short. Mercy matters more than margin.

Jesus is not telling us to be dishonest. He’s telling us to be *wise* about what lasts. “Make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth,” He says, “so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into eternal homes.”

That's Gospel language. It's not about buying heaven. It's about living now in the reality of the kingdom—where debts are forgiven, where generosity replaces gain, where our money serves mercy, not mastery.

Then comes the bottom line: “You cannot serve God and wealth.” Not should not. Cannot. Because both make absolute claims. And only one of them bled for you.

This parable turns the tables. The economy of the world is built on profit. The economy of Christ is built on gift. And the cross is the place where the debts of the world were canceled—not by cunning, but by costly grace.

So be shrewd. Not in securing your comfort—but in giving it away. Because in the kingdom, the only wealth that lasts is what mercy spent.

## GREEK WORD STUDIES ON THE GOSPELS

### PROPER 13 - Text Summary (Luke 12:13-21)

Jesus tells the story of a man whose fields produce abundantly. Instead of sharing or rejoicing in gratitude, he builds bigger barns and says to himself, “Soul, relax, eat, drink, be merry.” But God calls him a fool, and his life is demanded of him that very night. The parable ends with a warning: “So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

#### 1. Meris (μερίς) – “Share”

**Verse:** *“Tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”* (v.13)

**Greek root:** μερίς — a part, portion, or share. The request is for a legal and material division of inheritance. But the word meris is ironic—this man seeks his portion, while Jesus will later speak of a treasure that no barn can contain (v.21).

**Theological insight:** The man wants fairness on human terms. Jesus redirects the conversation entirely. The theology of the cross doesn’t deal in shares or fairness, but in gift. God doesn’t divide; He gives wholly—often to the undeserving.

#### 2. Pleroutein (πλουτεῖν) – “To Be Rich”

**Verse:** *“One’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”* (v.15)

**Greek root:** πλουτέω – to be rich, to become wealthy. This verb appears twice—once in the warning and once in the punchline: “not rich toward God.” The contrast is not between poor and rich, but between different kinds of wealth.

**Theological insight:** Wealth, in the theology of the cross, is not measured in assets but in grace. To be “rich toward God” is to live in dependence on His mercy. The rich fool believes he owns life. Jesus exposes the lie: wealth cannot save your soul.

### 3. Psyche (ψυχή) – “Soul”

**Verse:** “*Soul, you have ample goods...*” (v.19)

**Greek root:** ψυχή – soul, life, self. The man speaks to his psyche, as though he can secure or soothe it with grain. This is a rare moment in Scripture where someone tries to *preach to himself*—but the sermon is a lie.

**Theological insight:** The self cannot be secured by storage. The soul is not preserved by strategy. The theology of the cross says the psyche must die—so that it may be raised by grace, not grain.

### 4. Katathese (καταθήσω) – “I Will Store Away”

**Verse:** “*I will store all my grain and goods.*” (v.18)

**Greek root:** κατατίθημι – to lay down, deposit, store. This verb carries the tone of intentional safekeeping—as one would store treasure or make a deposit. It shows the man’s obsessive orientation toward *control*.

**Theological insight:** The theology of the cross confronts the myth of control. What we lay down in barns, Christ calls us to lay down in surrender. The true deposit is not our goods, but God’s mercy laid upon us in baptism.

### 5. Aphron (ἄφρων) – “Fool”

**Verse:** “*But God said to him, ‘You fool!’*” (v.20)

**Greek root:** ἄφρων – senseless, foolish, unwise. This is the only word God speaks in the parable—and it is a verdict. Not “evil” or “wicked,” but fool—one who acts without understanding the truth of things.

**Theological insight:** Foolishness, biblically, is not lack of intelligence—it’s misplacing trust. The fool in Proverbs says in his heart, “There is no God.” The rich man doesn’t curse God—but he

trusts barns more than grace. In contrast, the cross itself is foolishness to the world—but in it, we see the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:18–25).

## 6. Apaitousin (ἀπαιτοῦσιν) – “They Demand”

**Verse:** *“This very night your life is being demanded of you.”* (v.20)

**Greek root:** ἀπαιτέω – to demand back, to require. This verb is chilling—it is passive and plural. Literally: “They are demanding your soul.” It hints at divine reckoning, or even at the forces of death and judgment.

**Theological insight:** The man who thought he was in charge is suddenly the one who must answer. The cross reverses this: Jesus, the only innocent one, becomes the one whose life is required in our place. And in doing so, He breaks the claim death has on us.

## Bible Study for Youth/Young Adults

**Title:** *Found in the Story: When Jesus Tells the Truth About You*

**Scriptures:** Luke 12:13–16:13 (selected parables)

**Theme:** God isn't trying to improve you—He's coming to find you.

### Introduction: Why Parables Still Matter

Let's be real: we love stories. TikTok stories, true crime podcasts, movie marathons, even memes. We live in stories all the time. So did Jesus. But His parables weren't just relatable. They were disruptive.

Jesus told parables to reveal what's really going on. Not out there, but in here—in us. They're not “life lessons.” They're grace bombs. They mess with our assumptions about God, ourselves, and what matters.

If a parable feels a little uncomfortable... that's probably because it's working.

### Parables for Discussion

#### 1. The Rich Fool (Luke 12:13–21)

**Big Idea:** You can build a life that looks successful—and still lose it.

**Key Verse:** “This very night your life is demanded of you.”

**Discussion Prompt:** Where are you most tempted to think “if I just had more \_\_\_\_\_, I'd be okay”?

**Theological Insight:** The cross doesn't wait until your life is sorted. It meets you in your false security and calls it what it is: dead weight. Jesus doesn't bless your plans—He interrupts them.

#### 2. The Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin (Luke 15:1–10)

**Big Idea:** You don't find God. He finds you.

**Key Verse:** “There is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents...”

**Discussion Prompt:** Have you ever felt “too far gone” or invisible? What would it mean to be found?



**Theological Insight:** Repentance isn't climbing your way back. It's being carried home. In baptism, God doesn't just clean you up. He claims you. Forever.

### 3. The Wedding Feast and the Lower Seat (Luke 14:7–14)

**Big Idea:** God's table isn't a competition. It's a gift.

**Key Verse:** "Everyone who exalts themselves will be humbled."

**Discussion Prompt:** Where do you feel pressure to "prove yourself"?

**Theological Insight:** You don't earn your seat at God's table. Jesus took the lowest place so you could be raised. In His kingdom, the people who were overlooked get invited first.

### 4. The Dishonest Manager (Luke 16:1–13)

**Big Idea:** The way the world plays the game of worth isn't how God plays.

**Key Verse:** "You cannot serve both God and money."

**Discussion Prompt:** What are you tempted to use God to get—rather than just want God Himself?

**Theological Insight:** Jesus doesn't need you to be clever. He needs you to be honest. The cross isn't a transaction—it's a surrender. And it's worth everything.

### Wrap-Up Reflection

Every one of these parables has a twist. The twist is always this: You're not the hero. Jesus is.

And that's good news. Because if He's the one who finds, carries, forgives, invites, and sets the table—then no part of your story is outside His reach.

### Group Challenge / Takeaway

Pick one place this week where you're tempted to perform, to secure, or to prove yourself. Name it. Then say, "Christ is enough." And watch what happens.

## Leader's Guide: "Found in the Story" – The Parables of Jesus for Our Time

**Audience:** Youth/Young Adults

**Session Length:** 30–45 minutes

**Texts:** Select parables from Luke 12–16

**Theological Lens:** Theology of the Cross

**Primary Goal:** Help participants encounter Jesus not as a spiritual teacher or life coach, but as the crucified and risen Lord who finds, undoes, and restores us through mercy.

## **Session Preparation**

### **Environment:**

Use an informal space (living room, chapel, student center). Aim for a setting where honesty is welcome and vulnerability is safe.

### **Materials:**

- Bibles or Bible apps (Luke 12–16)
- Printed or digital copies of the discussion guide
- A notepad or journal for each participant (optional)

### **Tone:**

Facilitate a space that is reflective, not performative. Keep the focus on what Christ reveals and gives, not what participants need to achieve.

## **Session Flow**

### **1. Opening (5 minutes)**

#### **Leader Introduction:**

“Jesus didn’t tell parables to decorate the Gospel, but to drive it in. His stories are not simple illustrations. They disrupt. They reveal. And if we listen, they’ll expose where we trust ourselves more than God—and invite us into grace.”

#### **Icebreaker Question:**

What’s a story, meme, or moment recently that made you stop and say, “That hit harder than I expected”?

## **2. Parable Discussions (25–30 minutes)**

You may cover all five in one extended session, or split across two or three weeks.

### **Parable 1 – The Rich Fool (Luke 12:13–21)**

- Key theme: false security
- Questions:
  - What kinds of “barns” do people build today to feel safe or worthy?
  - What might it look like to be “rich toward God” in your world?
- Theological emphasis: The Gospel doesn’t confirm our plans—it undoes our self-made security and gives us a new identity rooted in grace.

### **Parable 2 – The Lost Sheep & Lost Coin (Luke 15:1–10)**

- Key theme: divine joy in finding
- Questions:
  - How does it feel to be the one pursued or carried?
  - Can you name a time when grace found you before you were ready?
- Theological emphasis: Repentance is not our achievement—it’s being found. The cross isn’t an invitation to climb back; it’s the Shepherd coming down.

### **Parable 3 – The Wedding Feast (Luke 14:7–14)**

- Key theme: reversal of status
- Questions:
  - Where do you feel the pressure to perform or be impressive?
  - What’s the difference between being honored by others vs. by God?
- Theological emphasis: The lowest seat is not a punishment—it’s where Jesus meets you. Baptism doesn’t improve you; it buries you and raises you.

### **Parable 4 – Counting the Cost (Luke 14:25–33)**

- Key theme: surrender and death of ego
- Questions:

- What do you cling to that would be hard to lose for Christ?
- How do you hear Jesus' words about "hating" family or life?
- Theological emphasis: Discipleship means dying to all that props up your worth—and being re-created in mercy.

### **Parable 5 – The Dishonest Manager (Luke 16:1–13)**

- Key theme: loyalty, trust, and eternal priorities
- Questions:
  - What “masters” besides Christ compete for your trust?
  - What would it look like to be “shrewd for mercy” today?
- Theological emphasis: The Gospel is not a currency to manage—it's a gift to receive. You can't serve two masters. But you don't need to. Christ is enough.

### **3. Wrap-Up (5–10 minutes)**

#### **Closing Reflection:**

“Each of these parables has a twist. The twist is that you're not the hero. Jesus is. The lost are found, the last are honored, the dead are raised. That's not your work. It's His. And it's yours—because He gives it to you.”

#### **Group Prayer or Quiet Reflection:**

“Jesus, undo what I use to protect myself. Find me where I'm still lost. Take the lowest seat with me—and raise me in Your mercy. Amen.”

#### **Challenge for the Week:**

Invite each participant to write a one-sentence prayer or declaration:

“This week, I'm leaving behind \_\_\_\_\_ because Christ is enough.”

## GREEK WORD STUDY

### PROPER 14 – Text Summary (Luke 12:32–40)

Jesus speaks tenderly and urgently to His disciples: “Do not be afraid, little flock...” He speaks of the Father’s pleasure in giving the kingdom, of treasure that does not fade, of lamps lit in watchful readiness. The passage ends with a master who returns and, shockingly, *serves* his own servants.

#### 1. *Phobou* (φοβοῦ) – “Do not be afraid”

**Verse:** “*Do not be afraid, little flock...*” (v.32)

**Greek root:** *φοβέσθαι* – to fear, be alarmed. This is a present imperative with the negative, meaning not simply “don’t start fearing,” but “stop being in a state of fear.” It’s addressed to people who *are* afraid—and rightly so, if they are depending on themselves.

#### **Theological insight:**

This is not therapeutic reassurance—it is Gospel announcement. In the theology of the cross, fear is never driven out by control or success, but by a Word of *gift*: “It is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” You do not earn the kingdom. You receive it—therefore, do not fear.

#### 2. *Eudokēsen* (εὐδόκησεν) – “Was well pleased” / “Delighted”

**Verse:** “...for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” (v.32)

**Greek root:** *εὐδοκέω* – to be well pleased, to delight in. This verb reveals God’s inner disposition—not reluctant mercy, but *delighted generosity*. It’s the same verb used at Jesus’ baptism: “This is my Son, the Beloved, in whom I am well pleased.”

#### **Theological insight:**

In the theology of the cross, God’s pleasure is not found in our performance, but in His Son. And now, that same pleasure over Jesus is extended to us. The kingdom is not God’s backup plan. It is His *joy* to give it—freely, to the undeserving, to the fearful flock.

### 3. *Thēsaūrizete* (θησαυρίζετε) – “Store up” or “Treasure”

**Verse:** “*Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out... a treasure in heaven...*” (v.33)

**Greek root:** *θησαυρίζω* – to store up, to amass treasure, This verb connects with the noun *thēsauros* (treasure). Jesus is not anti-wealth—He is showing that what we treasure reveals what we trust. The contrast is between treasure that rots and treasure that remains.

#### **Theological insight:**

The theology of the cross redirects our storing: we don’t pile up for control; we pour out in trust. Christ Himself becomes the treasure given from heaven, and our wealth—if it exists—is reoriented not toward permanence, but toward **mercy**.

### 4. *Girded* (περιζωσμένοι) – “Be dressed for action” / “Let your loins be girded”

**Verse:** “*Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit.*” (v.35)

**Greek root:** *περιζώννυμι* – to gird oneself, to tie up one’s garments for movement. This phrase comes from the posture of readiness: tying up a tunic to be able to move or serve. It implies urgency and preparation, not sloth or distraction.

#### **Theological insight:**

But here’s the twist: in the Gospel, readiness does not make the kingdom come—it receives it. The cross has already secured the future. Watchfulness, in this light, is not anxious performance but *hopeful waiting*. The bridegroom comes. We simply keep the lamps lit.

### 5. *Anatrepsēi* (ἀνατρέψει) – “He will have them sit down” / “He will recline them”

**Verse:** “*He will have them sit down to eat...*” (v.37)

**Greek root:** *ἀνατρέπω* – to cause to recline, especially at a banquet

. This is shocking. The *master* returns and has the *servants* recline—a reversal of roles. They don’t serve Him; He serves them. The language is Eucharistic, table-shaped.

**Theological insight:** This is the theology of the cross incarnate: the Lord becomes the servant. This is the Christ who washes feet, who breaks bread, who dies for the ones waiting in the night. The "readiness" Jesus commands is not to *earn* this gift—but to *receive* it with open hands.

## 6. *Erchetai* (ἔρχεται) – “He is coming”

**Verse:** “...*if he comes in the second or third watch...*” (v.38)

**Greek root:** ἔρχομαι – to come, to arrive. This is present tense, suggesting certainty and nearness. Not “might come,” but “He is coming.” And when He comes, He brings the kingdom with Him.

### **Theological insight:**

We don’t make the kingdom arrive. It comes to us. Just as Christ came once in humility, He will come again in glory—and both comings are rooted in mercy, not threat. The Christian life is lived in that space: not in fear of being unready, but in confidence that the One who comes brings grace.

## GREEK WORD STUDY

### PROPER 15 - Text Summary (Luke 12:49–56)

Jesus says, “I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!” He speaks of a baptism still to come and of a division that will cut through families. He then accuses the crowd of being able to interpret the weather, but not the present time.

#### 1. *Pyr* (πῦρ) – “Fire”

**Verse:** *“I came to bring fire to the earth...”* (v.49)

**Greek root:** πῦρ – fire. This word is elemental, uncontainable, purifying. Fire can destroy—but in Scripture, it also refines, consumes chaff, illuminates, and manifests God's presence (Exod. 3:2, Mal. 3:2, Acts 2:3).

**Theological insight:** In the theology of the cross, Christ's fire is judgment—not on the world as it imagines, but on the sin He bears Himself. The cross is the place where this fire is kindled fully—where justice and mercy burn together. Christ is not calling for violence. He is warning that His kingdom exposes what cannot coexist with grace.

#### 2. *Baptisma* (βάπτισμα) – “Baptism”

**Verse:** *“I have a baptism with which to be baptized...”* (v.50)

**Greek root:** βάπτισμα – immersion, submersion, ordeal. Though this word often refers to baptism with water, here it points forward to Christ's death. “Baptism” in this context is a plunge into suffering (cf. Mark 10:38). Jesus speaks of it with anguish: “How I am constrained until it is completed!”

**Theological insight:** This baptism is the cross, where Christ is fully immersed in the wrath and weight of sin—not His own, but ours. And through that baptism, our own is made effective: we are joined to His death, buried with Him, and raised (Rom. 6). In this way, His “fire” is not destruction—it is the refiner's work that begins at Calvary.



### 3. *Synestēsan* (διεμερίσθησαν / διαίρεθῆναι) – “To be divided”

**Verse:** “*Do you think I have come to bring peace...? No, but rather division.*” (v.51)

**Greek root:** *διαμερίζω* / *διαίρέω* – to divide, separate, cause dissension. This verb is passive, emphasizing that division is a consequence, not the goal. Jesus doesn’t seek division—but the truth He brings inevitably splits illusions, uncovers loyalties, and forces a reckoning.

**Theological insight:** The cross is the great divider—not because God loves conflict, but because grace refuses to coexist with our idols. Where Christ is proclaimed, something always breaks: our false peace, our self-righteousness, our demand to control God. The result is not always harmony—but truth that finally heals.

### 4. *Eirēnēn* (εἰρήνην) – “Peace”

**Verse:** “*Do you think I have come to bring peace?*” (v.51)

**Greek root:** *εἰρήνη* – peace, harmony, well-being. In Luke’s Gospel, this word appears in the angelic announcement (“peace on earth”), in Simeon’s song (“now let your servant depart in peace”), and at the resurrection. But here, Jesus denies it—in this moment.

**Theological insight:** This is crucial: Christ is not denying that He brings peace—He is denying the peace we expect. The peace of the cross is not diplomacy. It is *reconciliation through death*. Not sentiment, but cruciform restoration. We must lose our old peace (which covers over sin) to receive the real one (which atones for it).

### 5. *Diakrīnesthe* (διακρίνεσθε) – “To Interpret” / “Discern”

**Verse:** “*Why do you not know how to interpret the present time?*” (v.56)

**Greek root:** *διακρίνω* – to distinguish, discern, judge between. Jesus rebukes the crowd for reading the skies but failing to read the signs of His coming. Their discernment is worldly—practical, superficial—but blind to what truly matters.

**Theological insight:** The theology of the cross is a hidden word. It does not impress the world. It must be *discerned* by those who are willing to see glory in suffering, kingship in crucifixion, and life in death. To interpret the times rightly is to see Christ—not in power, but on the cross.

## 6. *Kairos* (καιρός) – “Time”

**Verse:** “...*the present time.*” (v.56)

**Greek root:** *καιρός* – appointed time, critical moment, season. This is not clock-time (*chronos*), but decisive time—the moment that demands a response. It is the same word Jesus uses in Mark 1:15: “The time is fulfilled... repent and believe the Gospel.”

**Theological insight:** The cross is the definitive *kairos*. The moment where history is interrupted by mercy. Jesus is warning: Don’t miss the hour. Don’t mistake delay for absence. Don’t sleep through the fire. The kingdom has come—and it sets the world on edge, not because it is violent, but because it unmasks every counterfeit peace.

## GREEK WORD STUDY

### PROPER 16 Text Summary (Luke 13:10–17)

Jesus sees a woman bent over for eighteen years. Without being asked, He calls her forward, speaks a word of release, lays hands on her, and she stands upright. The synagogue leader objects—it's the Sabbath. Jesus responds by calling out the hypocrisy: if they untie an ox on the Sabbath, should not this daughter of Abraham be unbound?

#### 1. *Astheneia* (ἀσθένεια) – “Infirmity / Weakness”

**Verse:** “...a woman was there who had a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years.” (v.11)

**Greek root:** ἀσθένεια – weakness, frailty, sickness. This is more than physical ailment. It's a condition of powerlessness, a sustained vulnerability. The text emphasizes duration—eighteen years of being bowed down, unseen, unnamed.

**Theological insight:** In the theology of the cross, God meets us not in strength but in weakness. He does not wait for us to rise; He stoops. The woman becomes an icon of what it means to be claimed in the midst of infirmity—not healed because she believes, but healed because Christ sees her.

#### 2. *Sugkyptousa* (συγκύπτουσα) – “Bent over”

**Verse:** “...and she was bent over and could not fully straighten herself.” (v.11)

**Greek root:** συγκύπτω – to be bent completely forward, bowed down. This word is vivid. It carries connotations not just of physical posture, but shame, burden, and exclusion. She cannot look up. She cannot meet another's gaze.

**Theological insight:** The theology of the cross tells us that Christ does not ask the bent to straighten themselves. He calls them. He speaks. And His Word does the lifting. In this way, this “bent-over woman” represents all of us: unable to lift ourselves, unable to justify our condition, until the Word speaks us upright.

### 3. *Apolehusai* (ἀπολέλυσαι) – “You are set free / Loosed”

**Verse:** “*Woman, you are set free from your weakness.*” (v.12)

**Greek root:** ἀπολύω – to release, dismiss, set loose

. This is a perfect passive verb: you have been released. It’s not a future hope or a conditional promise. It’s a completed act—God has already done it.

**Theological insight:** This is pure Gospel. Jesus does not give her instructions. He speaks absolution. The woman does not first prove herself worthy—she is simply freed. Forgiveness is Not a transaction. It is a verdict.

### 4. *Epitheis* (ἐπιθεῖς) – “He laid hands on her”

**Verse:** “*...and he laid his hands on her.*” (v.13)

**Greek root:** ἐπιτίθημι – to lay upon, to place deliberately. This verb reflects intentional, intimate action. Jesus does not heal from a distance. He touches her bent body, a gesture of both power and solidarity.

**Theological insight:**

At the cross, Christ takes on our infirmity, not by word only, but in flesh. This touch anticipates that deeper exchange. He lays His life on us—not as burden, but as mercy.

### 5. *Luein* (λύειν) – “To Untie / To Loose”

**Verse:** “*Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey...?*” (v.15); “*...should not this woman be loosed?*” (v.16)

**Greek root:** λύω – to loosen, untie, release. Jesus uses this common verb—used for freeing animals—to describe what He has just done for a woman. It’s jarring, earthy. He compares religious tolerance for livestock care to the resistance against mercy for a human being.

**Theological insight:** Jesus uses the language of the ordinary to expose the cruelty of the pious. He reclaims the Sabbath—not to protect it, but to fulfill it. The real Sabbath is not rules. It is release. It is the untying of the bound.

## 6. *Hantizen* (ἀντιζῆν) – “Oppose / Be Indignant”

**Verse:** “*But the leader of the synagogue, indignant...*” (v.14)

**Greek root:** ἀντιζέω – to be angry in opposition, to grumble against. This word is loaded. The leader isn’t angry at the woman—he’s angry at the freedom. He resents the timing of mercy. He doesn’t deny the healing. He resents how freely it was given.

**Theological insight:** This is what the theology of glory cannot abide: grace that does not wait its turn. The old Adam rages at a kingdom that comes without conditions. But the theology of the cross reveals this scandal as salvation: Christ sets the bound free, even when it offends our order.

## GREEK WORD STUDY

### PROPER 17 Text Summary (Luke 14:1, 7–14)

Jesus is invited to dine at the house of a leading Pharisee. Watching how guests choose the best seats, He tells a parable about humility at the table: don't seek honor—take the lowest place and be called up. He then tells the host: don't invite the powerful, but the poor, the lame, the blind—those who cannot repay.

#### 1. *Klisēis* (κλήσεις) – “Invitations” / “Invited Guests”

**Verse:** *“He noticed how the guests chose the places of honor...”* (v.7)

**Greek root:** κλησις – a calling, invitation, summons. This word implies not just a social invite, but a summons—a word with resonance in Scripture. Paul uses it in Romans and Ephesians to speak of the call to faith.

**Theological insight:** Jesus sees that even at a table meant for fellowship, people use invitations to jockey for position. But in the kingdom, the true *klēsis* comes not from social rank, but from the voice of the Host who calls sinners to Himself—not because they belong, but because He has made a place.

#### 2. *Prōtoklisia* (πρωτοκλισία) – “Best Seat” / “Place of Honor”

**Verse:** *“...they chose the places of honor at the table.”* (v.7)

**Greek root:** πρῶτος (first) + κλίνη (reclining couch or seat). The best seats were closest to the host, and they signified status, recognition, belonging. Jesus sees the guests claiming these places instinctively—as a right.

#### **Theological insight:**

In the theology of the cross, honor is not seized; it is given. The cross reverses the order: the first

become last, the exalted are brought low, and the ones in the shadows are called forward. The best seat is not at the head of the table—but at the place where mercy meets us without merit.

### 3. *Tēn eschatēn topon* (τὴν ἐσχάτην τόπον) – “The Lowest Place”

**Verse:** “Go and sit down at the lowest place...” (v.10)

**Greek root:** ἔσχατος – last, least, lowest; τόπος – place. This phrase is central to the parable. Jesus isn’t advocating social strategy. He is describing the logic of the kingdom: the way up is down.

**Theological insight:** To take the *eschatē topos* is not self-abasement—it is Christ-likeness. Jesus takes the lowest place—at the table, on the cross—so that He might call others up. In this movement, we see the cross-shaped pattern of grace: honor comes not from claiming, but from being called.

### 4. *Proskaleitai* (προσκαλεῖται) – “He Calls You Forward”

**Verse:** “Friend, move up higher.” (v.10)

**Greek root:** προσκαλέω – to summon, to invite near. This verb is spoken by the host. It’s relational—“friend.” The one who took the lowest seat is not forgotten. He is called forward, not by effort but by grace.

**Theological insight:** This is the heart of the Gospel: God calls the lowly up. Not because they played their role well, but because the Host delights to honor the humble. In the cross, Christ is not only the one who descends. In baptism’s promise, He is also the one who now calls us upward through death into communion, adoption, and joy.

### 5. *Antapodounai* (ἀνταποδοῦναι) – “To Repay”

**Verse:** *“Do not invite those who can repay you...”* (v.12)

**Greek root:** ἀνταποδίδωμι – to give back, to recompense, to return in kind. This is the verb of exchange. It’s the engine of the world’s economy: do for others what they’ll later do for you. It’s the principle of strategic generosity.

**Theological insight:** Jesus flatly rejects this logic. The cross is not an economy of repayment—it is a gift economy. We are not called to generosity that builds our reputation, but to the kind that imitates Christ: giving to those who cannot repay. That is where divine joy resides.

## **6. Anastēsetai (ἀναστήσεται) – “Will Be Raised”**

**Verse:** *“...you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”* (v.14)

**Greek root:** ἀνίστημι – to raise, to lift up, to cause to rise. This verb is often used for bodily resurrection, but also for elevation, vindication, or new life. It connects the call to humility now with the promise of being raised later.

**Theological insight:** In the theology of the cross, resurrection is not a reward for humility—it is the outcome of union with Christ. The Host who calls us to the lowest place is also the One who raises the dead. And He alone determines the seating arrangement at the final banquet.



## GREEK WORD STUDY

### PROPER 18 Text Summary (Luke 14:25–33)

Large crowds are following Jesus. He turns and tells them plainly: “Whoever does not hate father, mother, wife, children—even his own life—cannot be my disciple.” He warns them to count the cost before building or going to war. Then the punchline: “None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.”

#### 1. *Misei* (μισεῖ) – “Hate”

**Verse:** “*Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother...*” (v.26)

**Greek root:** *μισέω* – to hate, reject, regard as secondary. Jesus uses deliberate shock language here—not to encourage hostility, but to signal absolute priority. In Jewish context, to “hate” means to subordinate—to place something second. Even the most cherished relationships must yield to the call of Christ.

**Theological insight:** In baptism, we are brought into a new family, a new allegiance. The old order—of bloodlines, obligations, and identities—is drowned with the old self. We do not despise our families, but we no longer derive our worth or direction from them. Baptism gives us a new center: Christ crucified. Everything else follows, or it gets left behind.

#### 2. *Mathētēs* (μαθητής) – “Disciple”

**Verse:** “*...cannot be my disciple.*” (vv.26, 27, 33)

**Greek root:** *μαθητής* – learner, follower, one who is taught. Jesus repeats this word three times for emphasis: discipleship isn’t an add-on or interest—it is total. You cannot follow Jesus halfway.

**Theological insight:** Baptism is the beginning of discipleship, not its reward. We are not made disciples by our commitment, but by God’s claim upon us in water and the Word. We are plunged into vocation, which is our cross. In baptism, we are no longer our own. The life of the disciple is not a heroic climb—it is a daily dying and rising with Christ (Luke 9:23; Rom. 6:3–4).

### 3. *Stauron* (σταυρόν) – “Cross”

**Verse:** *“Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me...”* (v.27)

**Greek root:** *σταυρός* – an execution stake, the cross. To take up the cross was to embrace shame, loss, and public death. Jesus says: this is the path. No disguises. No shortcuts.

**Theological insight:** In baptism, we are united with Christ in His death (Rom. 6:4–5). The cross we carry is not theoretical—it’s the daily consequence of having died to the world. We don’t carry the cross to prove ourselves. We carry it because we’ve already been crucified with Christ. Baptism puts the old self to death and raises us, daily, under the law, in the hard business of living, that we may live under the weight of the cross—in freedom.

### 4. *Psychēn* (ψυχὴν) – “Life / Soul / Self”

**Verse:** *“...and even hate their own life...”* (v.26)

**Greek root:** *ψυχή* – life, identity, the self in its fullness. Jesus confronts the instinct for self-preservation. To follow Him is to surrender the very thing we think we’re supposed to protect: our life.

**Theological insight:** Baptism is the death of the old *ψυχή*. The self that clings to success, control, and recognition is drowned. And out of that water rises a new self—not defined by self-interest, but by Christ’s mercy. To hate one’s life is not to despise it, but to no longer trust it to save you. Baptism replaces self-salvation with resurrection.

### 5. *Sumbalō* (συμβάλλω) – “To Consider / Count the Cost”

**Verse:** *“...will not first sit down and estimate the cost...”* (v.28)

**Greek root:** *συμβάλλω* – to deliberate, calculate, think through. Jesus offers two mini-parables (the tower and the king at war) to show that discipleship is not impulsive. It is costly—not just hard, but humanly impossible.

**Theological insight:** Baptism does not sidestep this cost—it pays it in full through Christ. He is the builder who finishes what we cannot start. He is the King who goes to war and wins without us lifting a sword. The call to count the cost is real—but in baptism, we learn that the cost has already been counted, and Christ bore it for us to the end.

#### **6. *Apospasetai* (ἀποτάσσεται) – “To Renounce / Say Goodbye”**

**Verse:** “...*who does not give up all their possessions...*” (v.33)

**Greek root:** ἀποτάσσω – to renounce, to relinquish claim, to say farewell. This verb implies a decisive separation. Not just giving away stuff, but cutting ties with possessions as the source of meaning, security, or identity.

**Theological insight:** Baptism is the renunciation of every idol—especially the subtle ones like wealth, stability, and control. We are not called to asceticism. But we are called to live as those who no longer belong to themselves or their possessions. In baptism, God says to us: You have died. You are mine. Let everything else go.

## GREEK WORD STUDY

### PROPER 19 Text Summary (Luke 15:1–10)

The religious authorities complain that Jesus "welcomes sinners and eats with them." In response, Jesus tells two parables: one about a shepherd who leaves ninety-nine sheep to find one lost, and another about a woman who turns her house upside down to recover a single coin. In both stories, the central movement is: lost → found → rejoicing.

#### 1. *Prosdechetai* (προσδέχεται) – “Welcomes”

**Verse:** *“This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”* (v.2)

**Greek root:** *προσδέχομαι* – to receive favorably, to accept or embrace. The religious leaders don’t object to Jesus teaching sinners—they object to Him eating with them, receiving them as though they belong. The verb implies deliberate, gracious acceptance—not tolerance, but embrace.

**Theological insight:** Jesus doesn’t wait for repentance before He extends fellowship. In the logic of the cross, welcome precedes worthiness. Christ receives the unclean, the unprepared, the undeserving. The grace that eats with sinners is the same grace that will die for them.

#### 2. *Apolesas* (ἀπολέσας) – “Loses” / “Has Lost”

**Verse:** *“...having a hundred sheep and losing one of them...”* (v.4)

**Greek root:** *ἀπόλλυμι* – to perish, be ruined, lost in destruction. This is not soft language. The sheep isn’t just off-course—it’s as good as dead. The coin is inert, beyond help. This is the state of the lost: beyond self-recovery.

**Theological insight:** The cross doesn't come for the confused, but for the perishing. Jesus doesn't salvage potential—He raises the dead. He tells these stories not to flatter the lost, but to declare their rescue entirely His doing.

### 3. *Poreuetai* (πορεύεται) – “Goes After”

**Verse:** “...does he not leave the ninety-nine and go after the one that is lost...” (v.4)

**Greek root:** *πορεύομαι* – to go, travel, pursue. The shepherd does not shout instructions to the sheep from a distance. He goes after it. The same with the woman and her coin—there is no passive hope, only active pursuit.

#### **Theological insight:**

In the theology of the cross, God is not waiting at the end of the road. He is already in the thicket, already on the floorboards, searching. Christ is the God who pursues the unworthy—not to scold them, but to carry them home.

### 4. *Heuriskei* (εὕρισκει) – “Finds”

**Verse:** “And when he finds it...” (v.5); “...until she finds it.” (v.8)

**Greek root:** *εὕρισκω* – to discover, recover, obtain. This is certain finding, not accidental discovery. The shepherd searches until he succeeds. The woman does not give up. The outcome is assured.

**Theological insight:** This is what grace looks like when it acts: it does not fail. The finding is not contingent on the found—it rests on the determination of the one who seeks. These parables offer not instructions, but consolation: if you are lost, you are being sought, and the Finder will not stop.

### 5. *Metanoēsai* (μετανοήσας) – “Repents”

**Verse:** “...there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents...” (v.7)

**Greek root:** *μετανοέω* – to change one’s mind or direction, to turn. This word typically signals a turn or reversal—but here, it follows the finding. The sheep does not repent before being rescued. The coin does not change direction.

**Theological insight:** Repentance in this context is not the condition for grace, but the fruit of being found. And that's what happens in baptism: God finds us, names us, raises us, and turns us. The turn is real—but it is grace that turns us. In baptism, God grants repentance by acting first, not by waiting for us to act.

#### 6. *Synchairō* (συγχαίρω) – “Rejoice With”

**Verse:** *“Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.”* (v.6, also v.9)

**Greek root:** *συγχαίρω* – to celebrate together, share joy. This verb suggests communal rejoicing. The finder does not celebrate alone—joy spills outward, drawing in others.

**Theological insight:** The joy in these parables is not in restored order, but in recovered relationship. The Gospel, after all, is about reconciliation. Heaven does not rejoice over achievement, but over grace received. This is the joy of the cross: that the unworthy are brought in, that the dead are made alive, that the party is for the found.

## GREEK WORD STUDY

### PROPER 20 Text Summary (Luke 16:1–13)

Jesus tells a parable about a dishonest household manager who, upon learning he will be fired, reduces the debts owed to his master in order to secure favor with others. Though the manager's tactics are questionable, the master praises his shrewdness. Jesus then urges his listeners to be wise with worldly wealth—using it not for self-security, but to prepare for what lasts. The parable concludes with a clear division: no one can serve two masters. The central movement is: exposed → entrusted → divided loyalty.

#### 1. *Diaballein* (διαβάλλειν) – “Accused” / “Brought Charges”

**Verse:** “*There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him...*” (v.1)

**Greek root:** διαβάλλω – to slander, accuse, inform against. The manager's fall begins with accusation—whether true or not, he stands exposed, vulnerable, summoned to account.

**Theological insight:** The cross always begins with exposure. No one walks into grace with a polished résumé. We are named as sinner. We are: accused, accountable, empty-handed. The Gospel never denies the charge—it simply transfers the sentence.

#### 2. *Oikonomos* (οἰκονόμος) – “Manager” / “Steward”

**Verse:** “*...who had a manager...*” (v.1)

**Greek root:** οἰκονόμος – steward, household administrator, one who manages another's resources.

This word frames the entire parable: the manager has authority but not ownership. His task is fiduciary faithfulness—but he is called unfaithful.

### **Theological insight:**

This is the truth of our lives: we are not owners, only stewards—of breath, of wealth, of mercy. The theology of the cross strips away illusions of control. What we have is entrusted, not earned. The question is never “what do I deserve?” but “what am I doing with what I’ve been given?”

### **3. *Phronimos* (φρόνιμος) – “Shrewdly / Wisely”**

**Verse:** “...*the master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly.*” (v.8)

**Greek root:** *φρόνιμος* – prudent, practically wise, cunning. This is the twist: the master praises not the morality of the manager, but his urgent, savvy action in light of a crisis.

**Theological insight:** Jesus is not telling us to lie or cheat—but to be urgent and clear-eyed about the nature of the time we’re living in. In the theology of the cross, grace reorders our values.

Shrewdness is not manipulation—it’s living in light of what’s coming. The manager prepares for a future he can’t control—we are called to do the same, knowing mercy is our only security.

### **4. *Dikaiōthēti* (δικαιωθῆτε) – “Justified / Be Received”**

**(Note: Not explicit in this passage, but embedded in the theme)**

Though this term doesn’t appear directly, the parable is driving toward a question of **righteousness**—how one is “received” when everything collapses.

**Theological insight:** In this parable, the manager stakes everything on mercy, not accounts. He lets go of calculation and casts himself into the generosity of others. This is what baptism enacts: we are not justified by accurate bookkeeping, but by the mercy of a Lord who receives the unworthy. It is not fair bookkeeping—it is grace in action.

### **5. *Mamōna* (μαμωνᾶ) – “Wealth” / “Mammon”**

**Verse:** “*You cannot serve both God and mammon.*” (v.13)

**Greek root:** *μαμωνᾶς* – Aramaic loan word meaning wealth or property, often personified as a false god. Jesus personifies wealth here. It becomes a rival master, demanding loyalty, commanding service. Mammon is not neutral—it is a liturgical power, shaping hearts and habits.



**Theological insight:** The theology of the cross forces a choice: grace or gain, mercy or mammon. You cannot hold both. Mammon offers security now—but demands your soul. Christ offers mercy—but creates your poverty. Only in Christ—whose riches were poured out into our poverty—do we find treasure that endures.

#### 6. *Pistoi* / *Pistos* (πιστοὶ / πιστός) – “Faithful”

**Verse:** *“Whoever is faithful in little is also faithful in much...”* (v.10)

**Greek root:** *πιστός* – faithful, trustworthy, loyal. Jesus reframes faithfulness: it is not about quantity of wealth, but integrity with what’s been entrusted—especially when little.

**Theological insight:** Faithfulness, in the theology of the cross, is not heroic abundance, but humble stewardship. It’s not measured in results but in trust. Even in small things—even in daily, hidden acts—Christ is forming people who live not for return but from mercy. Baptismal life is lived out this way: in the quiet, faithful uses of what was never ours to begin with.

## HOMILIES

### PROPER 13 HOMILY: “The Rich Fool and the Wind”

**Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12–14; 2:18–23 , Col. 3:1–11, Luke 12:13–21**

Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher. All is vanity. You can feel it, can't you? That sigh behind the words. The ache of someone who's built the houses, filled the barns, won the prizes—and still found it all like chasing the wind. Ecclesiastes isn't bitter. He's just honest. He's what happens when a person climbs to the top of the ladder and discovers it's leaning against the wrong wall.

And then in Luke, someone in the crowd shouts at Jesus: “Tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me!” It sounds like a legal squabble. But Jesus hears something deeper—something that lives in us all. The grasp. The belief that just a little more—more money, more security, more control—will give us peace. That we can build barns big enough to silence our fear of death.

And Jesus tells a parable. A rich man thinks he's set for life. “Relax, eat, drink, be merry,” he says. But God calls him a fool. Not because he's rich—but because he forgot what life is. Because he mistook storage for salvation. He spent his life securing what cannot save.

This is the theology of the cross: it names the truth we'd rather avoid. That your barns will not keep you alive. That your résumé will not outlast you. That everything you try to hoard—whether it's wealth, achievement, or reputation—will one day be handed to someone else. As Paul says in Colossians, “You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”

Did you hear that? *You have died*. Not will die someday. Not metaphorically. But already. Because in baptism, God has already stripped off your old self with its greed and striving and shame. You have nothing left to prove. No legacy to secure. You are free.

That's why Paul says, “Set your minds on things above.” Not because the things of earth are evil, but because they cannot carry the weight of your soul. You were made for more than your net worth or your title or the size of your grain bins. You were made for Christ. And in Him, your life is not stored—it's given. Not secured—it's shared. Not hidden in vaults—but hidden in God.

So come die again. Die to the fear that clutches. Die to the greed that says, “Just a little more.” And rise with Christ, whose riches are mercy, whose inheritance is joy, and whose kingdom is the only one not built on sand. Amen.

## PROPER 14 HOMILY: “Do Not Be Afraid, Little Flock”

Genesis 15:1–6, Hebrews 11:1–3, 8–16 , Luke 12:32–40

“Do not be afraid, little flock,” Jesus says, “for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Not sell it. Not lease it. Not make you earn it. Give it.

That sentence should stop us in our tracks. Because most of us—if we’re honest—spend a good part of our lives trying to earn what has already been given. We worry. We store. We plan. We try to make ourselves secure. We live like the kingdom might slip through our fingers if we’re not careful enough, faithful enough, busy enough.

But the kingdom does not come that way.

Remember Abram? Genesis tells us he believed the Lord—and it was credited to him as righteousness. That’s it. He trusted a promise he couldn’t yet see. He trusted a God who told him to look at the stars, not his circumstances. He was old. His wife was barren. The inheritance God spoke of seemed impossible. But faith isn’t about seeing the result. It’s about being held by the promise.

And Hebrews takes that promise and stretches it across the centuries: Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob—none of them received the full thing. But they saw it from a distance. They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. They were not trying to build a kingdom for themselves. They were waiting for a better one—one built not with human hands, but by God.

That’s what Jesus is talking about in Luke when he tells his disciples to be ready. To stay dressed for action. To keep the lamps burning. But not out of fear. Not to impress the master. No—because the master is the one who, when he returns, **puts on an apron and serves them at the table**. Do you see the reversal? In this kingdom, **the Lord becomes the servant**.

That’s what the theology of the cross reveals: the one who gives the kingdom also gives Himself. He is not the master who waits for you to measure up. He is the Master who stoops to wash feet. The King who serves. The Lamb who dies. The one who brings the kingdom not to the worthy but to the worried. Not to the mighty but to the little flock.

This is why we don't cling to our possessions. This is why we give away what the world says to protect. Not because it's safe. Not because it makes sense. But because we've already been given more than we could earn. Because we know the end of the story—and it ends with joy. It ends with Jesus at the table.

So lift up your heads, little flock. Trust the promise. Stay dressed—not for fear, but for feasting. The kingdom is not earned. It is given. And it is coming.

Amen.

## PROPER 15 HOMILY: “A Fire on the Earth”

Jeremiah 23:23–29, Hebrews 11:29—12:2, Luke 12:49–56

“Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?”

That’s the voice of Jeremiah today—not gentle, not soothing, but disruptive. God is not interested in soft lies or easy religion. He doesn’t come to affirm our dreams or reinforce our illusions. He comes to burn down the false comfort—and speak a word that actually does something. A word that breaks and heals. A word that judges and saves.

Jesus picks that up in Luke. “I came to bring fire to the earth,” He says, “and how I wish it were already kindled!” These aren’t words we embroider on pillows. They aren’t easy to hear. But they are true. Because the Gospel is not spiritual sedation—it’s the announcement that God is ending the old world. The false peace. The shallow unity. The religious games. And yes, it divides.

But don’t mistake that fire for wrath alone. The fire Jesus brings is not destruction for destruction’s sake. It is the fire of truth. The fire that burns away self-justification and makes room for grace. It is the fire that leads Him to the cross. When He says, “I have a baptism with which to be baptized,” He isn’t talking about water. He’s talking about the flood of suffering and judgment He’s about to endure—in our place.

The fire He brings, He bears.

And that’s where Hebrews anchors us today: “Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.” But don’t miss what comes before. That long list of saints—Abraham, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, those who walked through the Red Sea, those who suffered mocking, chains, and death—they weren’t triumphant in the world’s eyes. They were clinging to a promise they hadn’t seen. They lived by faith, not by sight.

That’s the shape of the cross. We follow a crucified Lord. We are not promised ease or applause. We are promised Christ. And Christ is not safe. But He is true. And He does not abandon His people in the fire—He walks with them through it. He does not leave you in the race—He has already run ahead. He does not wait for you to climb to heaven—He descends, takes on your sin, and baptizes it in His own blood.

So no, the Christian life is not comfortable. It's not meant to be. But it is real. It is honest. It is anchored in something more than sentiment. It is anchored in baptism's promise. And in that promise, there is joy. Because the same Jesus who says, "I came to bring division," is the one who was divided for you—torn on the cross, so that nothing will separate you from the love of God.

May that word burn in you today—not to destroy, but to set you free.

Amen.

## PROPER 16 HOMILY: “Loosed from the Yoke”

Isaiah 58:9b–14 , Hebrews 12:18–29 , Luke 13:10–17

The bent woman doesn’t ask for healing. She’s there in the synagogue—present but unseen, devout but dismissed. Eighteen years she’s been stooped over, her eyes on dust, her back bowed under more than just gravity. Luke doesn’t name her pain, but we know something about that shape. Shame will do that to a person. So will chronic disappointment, old wounds, religious performance.

And Jesus sees her.

He doesn’t ask if she’s worthy. He doesn’t wait for the Sabbath to end. He calls her forward, lays His hands on her, and says: *“Woman, you are set free from your ailment.”* And immediately, she stands tall. She praises God.

But not everyone rejoices.

The synagogue leader objects—not to the healing, really—but to the timing. There’s a proper order to things. A way to preserve control. And Jesus cuts through it: “Does not each of you untie your ox or donkey on the Sabbath and lead it to water? Should not this daughter of Abraham be loosed from her bondage too?”

That’s the word: loosed.

The Isaiah text echoes that: “If you remove the yoke... if you offer yourself to the hungry... the Lord will guide you... your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt.” But it begins with loosening the bonds. And the truth is, we are much better at managing burdens than we are at laying them down. We’d rather add a little piety to our lives than be broken open by grace. We prefer safe religion to disruptive mercy. We want God on schedule, healing with permission.

But the kingdom doesn’t wait for permission. Hebrews reminds us that we have not come to a mountain of fire and fear, but to Mount Zion, to the living God, to the blood that speaks a better word than Abel. That word is Jesus. And it does not ask what you’ve earned. It does not wait for



your spine to straighten on its own. It calls you forward. It lays hands on the shame you've been carrying and says: "You are loosed."

This is what the theology of the cross reveals: not a God who waits for perfect conditions, but a God who enters the mess. Not a God who asks if you're ready, but a Christ who takes on your bondage and breaks it in His body. And through that cross—through that shameful, healing Word—He gives rest. Not just from labor, but from the yoke of self-justification.

You are not a beast to be led from task to task. You are a child of God. A daughter of Abraham. A son of promise. You have been loosed—from the yoke of fear, from the crouch of shame, from the weight of proving yourself.

You may stand up, made right, justified. Not because you finally got it right—but because Christ has seen you. Claimed you. And He has spoken.

Amen.

## PROPER 17 HOMILY: “The Lower Place”

**Proverbs 25:6–7, Hebrews 13:1–8,15–16, Luke 14:1, 7–14**

Jesus is at a dinner party, and He’s watching. Watching how people angle for position. Watching how they choose the best seats. Watching how they measure one another by proximity to power. Nothing has changed. The same instinct still hums beneath our daily lives—status, visibility, influence. It’s all a game of seats.

And Jesus tells a parable.

When you’re invited to a feast, He says, don’t grab the highest place. Take the lowest. Let someone else call you up, rather than be asked to step down. It’s good etiquette—but Jesus isn’t giving a seminar on social strategy. He’s pointing to something deeper. He’s exposing our need to be seen, known, elevated—and then He’s flipping the table.

Because in the kingdom of God, honor isn’t grasped—it’s given. Glory doesn’t rise from self-promotion, but from grace. *“Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled,”* Jesus says, *“and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”* That’s not advice. That’s a cross-shaped fact.

And then He says the most unsettling thing of all: when you give a banquet, don’t invite the people who can pay you back. Invite the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame. Invite those who can offer you nothing in return. Why? Because that’s what God has done with you. He didn’t wait for your résumé. He didn’t reward your record. He found you in the lower place—dust, doubt, failure—and said, *“Friend, move up higher.”*

That’s what Hebrews is describing: “Let mutual love continue. Show hospitality. Remember those in prison. Keep your lives free from the love of money. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” Why does that matter? Because in a world that keeps score, Christ has already settled the account—in blood. In baptism, He has seated you at His table—not because of who you are, but because of who He is.

This is the theology of the cross. It calls us down from our ladders. It breaks our habit of self-glory. And it sends us toward the margins—not to fix the poor, but to remember who we are: the unworthy, seated by grace. We do not lift ourselves. We are lifted.

So today, we are free to take the lower place. Not to earn a reward. Not to gain reputation. But because it's already ours. Because Christ is there. Because the table is long, and grace keeps making room.

Amen.

## **PROPER 18 HOMILY: “Not Calculated, But Given”**

**Deut. 30:15–20, Philemon 1–21, Luke 14:25–33**

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even life itself—they cannot be my disciple.”

That’s not how most people expect Jesus to talk. We prefer the Jesus who soothes, who welcomes, who meets us where we are. But today He turns, faces the crowds, and speaks a hard word. Not because He wants fewer disciples—but because He wants real ones. This isn’t an altar call. It’s a funeral invitation. “Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”

Jesus is not asking for spiritual enthusiasm. He’s announcing what the cross will do to your life. It will sever you from the world’s economy of worth. It will strip away your backup plans, your safety nets, your spiritual bookkeeping. The cross is not something you carry for Christ. It is baptism’s first promise that He uses to kill the old self—in you.

That’s what Moses is naming in Deuteronomy when he says, “I have set before you life and death... therefore choose life.” But that “choice” isn’t a moral fork in the road. It’s a theological surrender. To choose life is to stop pretending you can secure it yourself. It is to let go of the illusion of control. It is to cling to the God who brought you out of slavery—not because you were worthy, but because He is merciful.

Which is why Paul’s little letter to Philemon matters so much here. He doesn’t issue a command. He could have. But he doesn’t. Instead, he appeals in love: “Receive Onesimus no longer as a slave but as a beloved brother.” Do you see it? The cross doesn’t just forgive individuals. It reorders our relationships. It tears down status. It gives back the one who ran away—not as a liability, but as family.

And that’s the heart of today’s Gospel. Jesus isn’t trying to make discipleship look difficult. He’s showing us that it’s not a negotiation. The kingdom is not a better version of your existing life. It’s a whole new life. One that begins where yours ends. One that cannot be budgeted or balanced—but only received.

The theology of the cross never flatters. But it never fails. Because what it exposes, it heals. What it demands, it gives. What it takes, it raises. So yes, count the cost. But don't stop there. Because when all the numbers fail, when the scaffolding collapses, when the ledger shows nothing but loss—there is Christ. And He is enough.

Amen.

## **PROPER 19 HOMILY: “While the Lost Are Still Lost”**

**Exodus 32:7–14 , 1 Timothy 1:12–17 , Luke 15:1–10**

They had barely gotten out of Egypt. Barely crossed the sea. And already the people were bowing to a golden calf, calling it their god, and throwing a party at the foot of Sinai while Moses was still up the mountain receiving the law. It's one of the lowest moments in the Old Testament. And God sees it. “Your people,” He tells Moses, “have turned aside. Let me alone, that I may consume them.”

But Moses intercedes. Not by defending the people. Not by downplaying the sin. He pleads on the basis of God's own promise: “Remember Abraham... remember Isaac... remember your oath.” And the Lord relents. Not because the people deserve it, but because mercy is stronger than judgment. God keeps His promise—even when we break everything else.

And that's the note Paul strikes in 1 Timothy. He's not bragging. He's confessing. “I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, a man of violence.” But Christ came to save sinners—“of whom I am the foremost.” The point isn't how far Paul had fallen. The point is how far Christ came to find him. This is not the testimony of someone who cleaned himself up and climbed back into God's good graces. This is the witness of someone who was knocked off his horse—and found mercy in the dirt.

Which brings us to Jesus in Luke. The Pharisees and scribes grumble, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” And so He tells them a parable. Or really, two: a shepherd leaves the ninety-nine to search for one lost sheep. A woman turns her house upside down to find a lost coin. The joy doesn't come after the lost returns. It comes while the lost are still lost—because the seeking has already begun.

God does not wait for you to come back. He comes after you. Christ does not reward the found. He finds the lost. He baptizes the ungodly. He does not ask for your qualifications. He finds you in your failure, your idolatry, your shame—and He puts you on His shoulders. He rejoices.

The cross is not God's Plan B. It is the place where God bears the full cost of the search. The place where God refuses to let your story end in ruin. And even now, He's still turning over the house, still leaving the flock, still coming after the one who wandered.

So if you feel like you've wandered too far—too guilty, too stuck, too tired—then hear this: “There is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents.” That's not a threat. That's a party waiting to happen.

Amen.

## PROPER 20 HOMILY: “What Can’t Be Bought”

Amos 8:4–7, 1 Timothy 2:1–7, Luke 16:1–13

“You cannot serve God and wealth.”

Jesus doesn’t say you shouldn’t. He says you can’t.

And in a world that trains us from the beginning to count, to store, to measure, and to compare—this is not just a hard word. It’s an impossible one. Which is precisely the point. The cross isn’t about slight adjustments to your life. It’s about the death of your old economy—where value is measured by productivity, virtue is mistaken for transaction, and salvation is something to be managed like a retirement plan.

That’s what Amos is calling out. The people keep the Sabbath with their lips, but their hearts are already back at the market. “When will the new moon be over?” they mutter, eager to get back to buying and selling—eager, in fact, to exploit the poor, to game the system, to pretend that worship and injustice can somehow coexist. God hears it. And He says, “I will not forget.”

That should sober us. Because we live in a time when religion easily becomes a tool of comfort or control. We pray for peace, while the vulnerable are trampled. We give lip-service to grace, while quietly believing we’ve earned our seat at the table. We may not use false ephahs or rigged scales—but we know how to pad the account of the self. And Jesus sees it.

That’s what makes His parable in Luke so strange. A dishonest manager squanders his master’s resources, and when he’s caught, he doubles down—reducing debts to secure his future. And the master? He **commends** him. Not for the dishonesty, but for the shrewdness. For knowing the game he was in—and making a decisive move.

Jesus isn’t telling us to cheat. He’s exposing how seriously we take worldly accounts, and how lightly we treat eternal ones. If we’re willing to strategize, to work the angles, to make urgent choices for money—why are we so slow, so passive, so hesitant when it comes to mercy, justice, and the things of God?



The theology of the cross breaks that open. It tells the truth about our false masters. It names how deeply we are tangled in systems of worth and reward. But then it gives what can't be bought: a God who does not tally your sins but lays them on Christ; a Savior who becomes poor so that in Him, you are made rich—not in coin, but in mercy.

As Paul writes in 1 Timothy: "There is one God and one mediator... Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all." Not earned. Not bartered. Given.

So yes, life involves choosing. And often our choices will often betray us. But fear not. You have been chosen. God has already made the decisive move. You are baptized. In Christ, you are free. One Master died for you.

And He alone is faithful.

Amen.

# **BIBLE STUDY: THE PARABLES OF JESUS — SEEN THROUGH THE CROSS**

## **Introduction: The Parables and the Death of the Old Self**

The parables of Jesus are not decorative stories scattered through the Gospels—they are central. They are not spiritual illustrations, but divine confrontations. They do not offer advice. They deliver judgment and mercy.

When Jesus tells a parable, He is not inviting us to consider a lesson. He is pulling the rug out from under the old self—the self that tries to justify, secure, and save itself. These stories undo us because they announce a kingdom that is not built on merit, effort, or religious performance. The parables do not reinforce the law; they expose its futility for salvation.

And just when we are left with nothing to stand on—no reputation, no standing, no spiritual resume—they open up the space for something new. For grace. For resurrection.

Jesus' parables are sermons of the cross in miniature. They kill what cannot live before God. And they raise what only mercy can create.

To read them rightly is to be confronted by the living Christ—the one who tells these stories not to reform the old, but to crucify it, and to raise you with Him in a righteousness not your own.

This is not safe storytelling. This is the Word of God doing its proper work.

**Texts: Luke 12:13–16:13 (Proper 13–20, Year C)**

**Focus: The Parables of the Rich Fool, Watchful Servants, Wedding Feast, Counting the Cost, Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, and the Dishonest Manager**

**Leader Style: Pastor Mark**

**Theological Lens: The Theology of the Cross**

**Session Title: "Stories That Break the Surface"**

**Opening Prayer:**

Lord Jesus, You told stories not to entertain us, but to reveal us—to uncover what we would rather hide. Send us Your Spirit now, that in hearing Your parables, we would not defend ourselves, but die and rise with You. Speak, and let us be found. Amen.

**PART I – FALSE RICHES, TRUE POVERTY****Luke 12:13–21 – The Parable of the Rich Fool**

**Summary:** A man’s land produces abundantly, so he tears down his barns to build bigger ones. He stores up grain and says to himself, *“Eat, drink, and be merry.”* But God says, *“Fool! This very night your life is required of you.”*

**Discussion:**

- What does this parable reveal about our need to control?
- Where do we see ourselves in the rich man’s internal monologue?
- What does it mean to be “rich toward God”? (v. 21)

**Theology of the Cross Insight:**

The rich man tries to secure his future by grasping. The cross exposes this as illusion. It teaches us that life is not gained through accumulation, but through loss—the death of the self that trusts in its own barns. Christ becomes poor to make us rich—not in grain, but in mercy.

**PART II – THE STRANGE JOY OF THE KINGDOM****Luke 12:32–40 – The Parable of the Watchful Servants**

**Summary:** The master returns at an unexpected hour—and does something shocking: he puts on the servant’s clothes and serves his servants at table.

**Discussion:**

- Why is it significant that the master serves?
- How does this image contradict our expectations of power?

- What does this say about grace?

### **Theology of the Cross Insight:**

This is Christ, crucified. The one who should be served serves us—in flesh, in bread, in blood. The gospel doesn’t ask, “Have you watched enough?” It announces that He has come, and He waits to serve. The parable teaches readiness not by fear but by promise.

## **PART III – WHEN THE GUEST LIST BREAKS THE RULES**

### **Luke 14:1, 7–14 – Parable of the Wedding Feast**

**Summary:** Those who take the high places are told to move down. Those who take the low place are lifted up. Then Jesus says, “When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.”

### **Discussion:**

- Who are the people Jesus names—and why?
- What does it mean to take the “lower place”?
- How does this shape our understanding of honor?

### **Theology of the Cross Insight:**

At the cross, Jesus takes the lowest place—and gives it to us. In baptism, you are joined to that downward movement. You do not climb into God’s kingdom. You are seated by grace. The “lower place” is not a punishment—it’s where Christ is.

## **PART IV – THE MATH OF THE LOST**

### **Luke 15:1–10 – Parables of the Lost Sheep and Lost Coin**

**Summary:** A shepherd leaves 99 to find one lost sheep. A woman tears apart her house to find a single coin. In both, the movement is: lost → found → rejoicing.

**Discussion:**

- Why is there more joy over one lost who is found?
- What does this say about the nature of God?
- What does it mean to be truly found?

**Theology of the Cross Insight:**

God's joy begins while the lost are still lost. The cross isn't a rescue plan after we come home—it's the act of coming after us, into the thorns and the dirt. The lost don't find their way back. They are found. Carried. Rejoiced over. That's the gospel.

**PART V – KINGDOM ECONOMICS AND A DISHONEST MANAGER****Luke 16:1–13 – The Parable of the Dishonest Manager**

**Summary:** A steward, about to be fired, reduces debts to make friends. The master praises his shrewdness. Jesus ends with: “You cannot serve God and mammon.”

**Discussion:**

- What makes this parable so uncomfortable?
- What is the manager trying to secure?
- What does Jesus want us to notice?

**Theology of the Cross Insight:**

The parable exposes how seriously we take worldly accounts—and how lightly we take the grace of God. The cross shows us that the only wealth that lasts is mercy. Christ is not a resource to be managed. He is the gift that cannot be bought, but is given fully, at His own expense.

# **FOUND AND UNDONE:**

## **WORSHIP IN THE SEASON OF PENTECOST**

### **Gathering**

#### **Call to Worship**

##### **Leader:**

Come, you who build barns and clutch your plans.  
Come, you who have lost your way and your worth.  
Come, you who try to sit in the highest place—  
and you who were never invited at all.

##### **All:**

We come, not because we are ready—  
but because Christ has come for us.  
We come, not to impress—  
but to be found, forgiven, and fed.

#### **Opening Prayer**

O God of mercy,  
You tell stories that shake us awake.  
You break the ladders we build and open a table for the lost.  
By your Spirit, let these hours be true:  
where our pride is undone, our wounds are touched,  
and your grace finds us again.  
In Jesus' name. Amen.

## **Confession and Forgiveness**

### **Prayer of Confession**

Merciful God,  
We confess that we love being in control.  
We hoard what we cannot keep.  
We strive to be seen, to be praised, to win.  
But we are tired, Lord.  
And beneath the surface, we are afraid.  
Speak the word that undoes our illusions.  
Meet us in our need.  
Forgive us. Raise us.  
We cannot save ourselves. But You can.  
In Christ, have mercy. Amen.

### **Absolution**

In Christ, God does not wait for your success.  
He does not demand your spiritual résumé.  
He comes down, into your real life,  
and dies the death you fear—  
so He can raise you into a mercy you did not expect.

In the name of the crucified and risen Christ,  
your sins are forgiven. You are free. You are made new.  
Amen.

### **Hymn Suggestions**

- “Earth and All Stars” – (Herb Brokering) a joyful naming of ordinary life in God’s grace.
- “Now the Silence” – (Herb Brokering) meditative entry into Word and Sacrament.
- “Jesus, Priceless Treasure” – for those brought low and raised in Christ.
- “Come Ye Disconsolate” – balm for the broken.

- “The Church’s One Foundation” – rooted in Christ, not performance.

### **Gospel Acclamation (Before the Reading)**

#### **Leader:**

Jesus, You speak in parables that expose our illusions,  
 You speak mercy into the cracks of our defense.  
 Give us ears to hear what undoes us.  
 Give us faith to be found.

### **Prayers of the People**

#### **Leader:**

Let us pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

#### **After each petition:**

**Leader:** Lord, in Your mercy,

**All:** Hear our prayer.

#### **1. For the lost:**

For those who feel invisible, who think they are too far gone,  
 who wonder if they’re worth finding—  
 Send Your Shepherd, O Lord. Let them hear Your voice.  
 Carry them in grace.

#### **2. For the proud and the powerful:**

For those of us who build our worth with barns, status, and busy plans—  
 Break our grip, Lord. Let the cross interrupt us.  
 Lead us not to success, but to mercy.

#### **3. For the lowly and the forgotten:**

For those who never get the seat of honor—  
 Help us make room at the table.  
 Raise them up, and teach us to sit beside them with joy.



4. **For the church:**

That we may not be impressive but honest,  
Not clever but clear:  
Christ alone, Christ crucified, Christ risen.

5. **For those in need of healing, hope, or rest:**

(Silent or spoken names may be offered)  
Surround them with Your Spirit. Let them be carried, not by strength,  
but by Your promise.

**Closing Prayer:**

Into Your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray,  
trusting in Your mercy through Jesus Christ, who comes to find us. Amen.

**Offertory Reflection**

Jesus tells stories about lost sheep and dishonest managers, about coins and banquets. Even our money is not outside His reach. What we give today is not a trade—it is trust. It is participation in the grace that found us.

**Communion Invitation (if celebrated)**

Come not because you are good. Come because Christ is.  
Come not because you have earned your place,  
but because the One who took the lowest seat invites you.

This table is not a reward. It is a rescue.  
The bread is for the hungry. The cup is for the lost.  
Come—He finds you here.

**Closing Hymns (Suggestions)**

- “Guide Me Ever, Great Redeemer”
- “Lord, Take My Hand and Lead Me”
- “Let Us Break Bread Together”

- “Sent Forth by God’s Blessing”

### **Benediction**

Go now—

not to prove anything,

not to finish your list,

not to earn your place—

but to live as one who has been found.

May the God who baptized you keep you,

in the Christ who carries you home,

and in the Spirit who goes with you,

this day and always. Amen.