



# Luke: The One From the Future

*TEXT*  
*Luke 4:16–20;*  
*10:25–37*

January 26, 2020 — Sermon by Rev. Tom Are, Jr.

**M**ark taught us that the best place to find Jesus is in the wilderness of our lives. Jesus will show up and now and then grant us signs of God’s promised day. Matthew reminded us that at some time or another we are going to need a teacher; not one who simply gives us information about what life should be, but one who shows us. Jesus is that teacher.

Today we turn to Luke. Some of my favorite moments in the life of Jesus are told by Luke. Like the angel’s visit to Mary ... hail favored one. And those shepherds who learned to sing the angels’ song at midnight. Luke tells some of Jesus’ best stories: The parable of the rich man and Lazarus; the parable of the Good Samaritan; and, of course, the parable of the prodigal son and elder brother. And Luke knows of that mysterious journey on the road to Emmaus, when at table the bread was broken, and their eyes were opened, and they recognized the risen Lord. I love Luke. I do. But I reread Luke this week and was reminded why Luke is not my favorite. Luke pushes me. Sometimes Luke leaves me slack-jawed with confusion.

For it’s Luke that tells the parable of the dishonest manager who is praised for his dishonesty.<sup>1</sup> If you don’t know that parable, it wouldn’t surprise me, because I don’t know that I have ever heard a preacher tackle that one in a sermon. And in Luke, Jesus tells the parable of the pounds and then says this: “And regarding these enemies of mine, who did not want me to be king over them, bring them here and slaughter them in my presence.”<sup>2</sup> Slaughter them? Jesus said that? And regarding the demands of discipleship, Jesus says, “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters ... is not worthy of being my disciple.”<sup>3</sup> I wish Jesus hadn’t said that.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of the Jesus that Luke knows is his impatience. Jesus is insistent that things need to change — and change now.

In his first sermon, Jesus says, “The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” He is quoting Isaiah, who hundreds of years

earlier had lifted up this vision as a description of God’s promised day.<sup>4</sup> It’s a lovely description of life as God intends it. It’s a description of life where all that has gone wrong is made right. I love that. And the folks in Jesus’ day loved it too, as long as it remained the future. But this impatient Jesus wants to drag God’s future into the present, which means things have to change. And they didn’t want change.

We all have a certain investment in the status quo.

The way Luke tells it, Jesus can see God’s future with a clarity that the rest of us lack, and he is impatient for it to arrive. Jesus wants all of us to live as God intends us to live. And that sounds good, until we realize things must change.

Fredrik Backman’s novel *Us Against You* narrates life in a small town where life is defined by ice hockey. As we have seen this week, sometimes folks can confuse hockey, or basketball, with something important — and violence can break out. When that happens in a small town, it touches everyone.

Kevin is a teenager and a hockey star, who probably will play professionally. But Kevin sexually assaulted a classmate. As it usually happens, most folks

chose to believe him rather than her. But Kevin's friend, and witness, tells the truth. People no longer know how to treat their hockey star.

In a moment of grief, Kevin asks his mother, "Do you think it's possible to become a different person?"

His mom, carrying the heart-break of knowing her child abused another, said, "No, you can't. But it is possible to become a better person."<sup>5</sup>

It is possible to become a better person. I agree with that. But I usually want to do that on my own schedule. The problem with Jesus is that he has an impatience about him.

We didn't read the rest of Chapter 4. When Jesus read the old vision from Isaiah, people loved it. But when he said it's time to change things now, they ran him out of town. It says they wanted to hurl him off a cliff. And that's folks from home.

The Jesus that Luke knows is impatient. He insists that things must change.

It was December of 1986. Carol and I were dating. She flew to Charleston, where I lived. She arrived to discover that my Christmas decorating was underwhelming. I had a tree that had been given to me by the church preschool when they let out for the holidays. It made Charlie Brown's tree look robust. The preschoolers had already decorated the tree with stringed popcorn and paper chains made of construction paper. I might have done more, but it was my first Advent season as a pastor, and I was celebrating with the flu.

Carol decided the tree needed lights. "What's a Christmas tree without lights?" she said. She bought some lights and put them on the tree — and that's when things went from bad to worse. The lights were blinking lights. I told her it was perfect, but she would have nothing of it. She made it clear that this had to change. It was almost a statement of faith, as if Jesus could not be born if the tree had blinking lights. Back to the store they went.

Now the truth is, I didn't want blinking lights either. And maybe it was just the flu, but I just wasn't that worked up about it. I was willing to make my peace with the way things were. I'm that way a lot. Even when I know things should change, I'm willing to make my peace with the way things are.

When we are in that place, I don't know that I want to hurl Jesus over a cliff, but he sure can be irritating.

Jesus tells us how life should be: the poor have good news, the blind see, the oppressed are set free. And that sounds good to us, but don't ask us to change. But change is the whole point.

Why do you think this is so hard? It's not a rare thing for us to, both at the same time, want and *not* want what Jesus wants for us. The truth is, I want things to change. I want kids to go to school and not have to prepare for what they will do if someone walks in with a gun.

I want to enjoy a World Series and not have to wonder if a whole team is cheating — because if you are cheating at base-

ball, it isn't baseball anymore. I want the people who leave work and stop by our food pantry to have made enough at work that they can afford to drive by our food pantry.

I want children in this country to see a pediatrician every single year. I want the news media to tell the truth and those folks who peddle everything from half-truth to complete falsehood to stop talking. And I want the public to realize a free press is never our enemy.

I want our young people to know they are beautiful and that they are not defined by an embarrassment on social media. I want churches to stop being havens for racism. I want churches to lift up women rather than belittle them, and to be defined not by who they keep out rather than who they invite in. And I want churches to be safe places for everyone, especially children.

All of that means I want things to change.

I'm sure you do too. Your list may be different than mine, but I know you have your own list. So, when Jesus says things must change, why do we respond, "Not so fast!"

Well, there are several reasons: our investment in the way things are; our fear of sacrifice. But the biggest reason, I suppose, is revealed in this story we love.

A man came to Jesus: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"What do you think?" Jesus asked.

"Love God and love my neighbor," he offers.

"That's exactly right," Jesus tells him.

“But who is my neighbor? Of all the people out there, which ones qualify to be my neighbor? Whom am I to love?”

Jesus tells him a story and then asks him a question. Do you remember the question? Jesus asked him, “Who was the neighbor?”

“The one who had shown mercy.”

“That’s exactly right,” Jesus said.

You see what happened here, don’t you? Jesus flips the question. The man assumed that neighbor was a quality, a characteristic in them. But Jesus said, neighborliness doesn’t live in them; it lives in you. It isn’t about them; it’s about us.

That’s why it’s so hard. The promised day of God starts in very real ways, with us. What I know is I am the only person who can be Christian with my life. I know that Jesus is not ultimately going to ask me if my neighbor was Christian; Jesus is going to ask me if I was Christian to my neighbor.

Kevin asked, “Is it possible to be a different person?”

“No, but you can be a better person.”

The truth is, I don’t always want that. Sometimes I am afraid of trying to be a better person because I am afraid I will disappoint myself. I will let myself down. It’s easier just to settle, to accept the status quo. But then other times, I can’t bear that anymore, and I hunger for change. Sometimes what I want most is for things to change.

And when you get to that point, Luke is the gospel you

want. Because the Jesus Luke knows has seen the future, he has seen the life that God intends for us and for all. And he is pleading for us to follow him that he might take us there. And he would love to do that now.

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<sup>1</sup>Luke 16:1–9

<sup>2</sup>Luke 19:27

<sup>3</sup>Luke 14:26

<sup>4</sup>Isaiah 61:1–2

<sup>5</sup>Fredrik Backman, *Us Against You* (2018), p. 8

**This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.**

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church’s website: <http://www.villagepres.org/current-sermonsermon-archives.html>.