Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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October 19, 2021
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“Much will be required of the person entrusted with much” (Luke 12:48).

Rom 6:12-18; Luke 12:39-48

As the church tries to deal with the abuse scandals in today’s headlines, we might wonder if this problem has infected the church throughout its history. Today’s Gospel suggests that any organization where some people have power over others has the potential for abuse. In today’s Gospel, Luke’s Gentile churches, perhaps some of the ones founded by St. Paul, are being addressed with Jesus’ cautions to his Apostles about remaining vigilant and responsible for the communities they are leading. The time context is during the period when believers were expecting Jesus to return in glory to reward those who had been vigilant. Jesus had modeled service during his ministry and told his disciples they were not to lord it over others the way earthly rulers did.

Luke’s description of common problems in these faith communities is quite explicit. Pastors were failing as stewards in the distribution of food. They were settling in for the long haul and relaxing their vigilance to take advantage of their authority over those entrusted to them. Some were getting drunk and physically abusing pastoral workers, male and female. Rather than being examples of virtue to the surrounding society, these leaders were harming the church’s ministry as well as damaging trust within the church.

Knowing St Paul’s concerns about sexual mores in the Gentile world, we can safely assume that the church faced similar scandals. In his letters to the Romans and

Corinthians, he warns Christians about using their freedom from law because of God’s grace as a license to sin. Self-styled charismatic preachers have frequently mixed their spiritual power with personal liberties in this way.

Luke does not hesitate to warn the churches that the Master who returns unexpectedly would punish these pastors severely with “beatings” in proportion to their roles, since “more will be demanded of those entrusted with more.” The imagery does not translate very well into our modern sensibilities, but probably describes how slaves were treated at the time. It is strong language and hard to apply to Jesus as merciful and forgiving, but Luke wanted to make his point that church leaders would be held accountable. Today, offending clergy are defrocked and turned over to civil authorities and bishops are removed from office and stripped on their status. If Jesus rebuked and shamed the scribes and Pharisees for abusing their authority, would he show deference to his own representatives entrusted with his church?

Accountability is not an endgame or future threat. We know neither the day nor the hour. Jesus is always with his church, and nothing that happens will escape reckoning.

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