Dear Friends,

The Bible is a gift of God to the church, the people gathered around the world throughout the ages in the name of Christ. God uses this sacred writing to continue to speak to us in all times and places.

I encourage you to make it your own by dedicated prayer and study with others and on your own. Little Rock Scripture Study is a ministry of the Catholic Diocese of Little Rock. It provides the tools you need to faithfully understand what you are reading, to appreciate its meaning for you and for our world, and to guide you in a way that will deepen your own ability to respond to God’s call.

It is my hope that the Word of God will empower you as Christians to live a life worthy of your call as a child of God.

Sincerely in Christ,

+ Anthony B. Taylor
Bishop of Little Rock
Wrap-up lectures are available for each lesson at no charge. The link to these free lectures is LittleRockScripture.org/Lectures/LukePartTwo.
Welcome

The Bible is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. It is the Spirit-inspired word of God for us. It reveals to us the God who created, redeemed, and guides us still. It speaks to us personally and as a church. It forms the basis of our public liturgical life and our private prayer lives. It urges us to live worthily and justly, to love tenderly and wholeheartedly, and to be a part of building God’s kingdom here on earth.

Though it was written a long time ago, in the context of a very different culture, the Bible is no relic of the past. Catholic biblical scholarship is among the best in the world, and in our time and place, we have unprecedented access to it. By making use of solid scholarship, we can discover much about the ancient culture and religious practices that shaped those who wrote the various books of the Bible. With these insights, and by praying with the words of Scripture, we allow the words and images to shape us as disciples. By sharing our journey of faithful listening to God’s word with others, we have the opportunity to be stretched in our understanding and to form communities of love and learning. Ultimately, studying and praying with God’s word deepens our relationship with Christ.


The resource you hold in your hands is divided into five lessons. Each lesson involves personal prayer and study using this book and the experience of group prayer, discussion, and wrap-up lecture.

If you are using this resource in the context of a small group, we suggest that you meet five times, discussing one lesson per meeting. Allow about 90 minutes for the small group gathering. Small groups function best with eight to twelve people to ensure good group dynamics and allow all to participate as they wish.

WHAT MATERIALS WILL YOU USE?
The materials in this book include:

• Commentary by Michael F. Patella (which has also been published separately as part of the New Collegeville Bible Commentary series).

• Occasional inserts highlighting elements of the chapters of Luke being studied. Some of these appear also in the Little Rock Catholic Study Bible while others are supplied by staff writers.

• Questions for study, reflection, and discussion at the end of each lesson.

• Opening and closing prayers for each lesson, as well as other prayer forms available in the closing pages of the book.

In addition, there are wrap-up lectures available for each lesson. Your group may choose to purchase a DVD containing these lectures or make use of the audio or video lectures online at no charge. The link to these free lectures is: LittleRockScripture.org/Lectures/LukePartTwo. Of course, if your group has access to qualified speakers, you may choose to have live presentations.

Each person will need a current translation of the Bible. We recommend the Little Rock Catholic Study Bible, which makes use of the New American Bible, Revised Edition. Other translations, such as the New Jerusalem Bible or the New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition, would also work well.

HOW WILL YOU USE THESE MATERIALS?

Prepare in advance

Using Lesson One as an example:

• Begin with a simple prayer like the one found on page 11.

• Read the assigned material in the printed book for Lesson One (pages 12–21) so that you are prepared for the weekly small group session. You may do this assignment by reading a portion over a period of several days (effective and manageable) or by preparing all at once (more challenging).

• Answer the questions, Exploring Lesson One, found at the end of the assigned reading, pages 22–23.

• Use the closing prayer on page 24 when you complete your study. This prayer may be used again when you meet with the group.
Meet with your small group

- After introductions and greetings, allow time for prayer (about 5 minutes) as you begin the group session. You may use the prayer found on page 11 (also used by individuals in their preparation) or use a prayer of your choosing.

- Spend about 45–50 minutes discussing the responses to the questions that were prepared in advance. You may also develop your discussion further by responding to questions and interests that arise during the discussion and faith-sharing itself.

- Close the discussion and faith-sharing with prayer, about 5–10 minutes. You may use the closing prayer at the end of each lesson or one of your choosing at the end of the book. It’s important to allow people to pray for personal and community needs and to give thanks for how God is moving in your lives.

- Listen to or view the wrap-up lecture associated with each lesson (15–20 minutes). You may watch the lecture online, use a DVD, or provide a live lecture by a qualified local speaker. This lecture provides a common focus for the group and reinforces insights from each lesson. You may view the lecture together at the end of the session or, if your group runs out of time, you may invite group members to watch the lecture on their own time after the discussion.

Above all, be aware that the Holy Spirit is moving within and among you.
Part Two

LESSON ONE

Introduction and Luke 12–13

Begin your personal study and group discussion with a simple and sincere prayer such as:

Prayer

God of all goodness, open my heart to hear you speak through the Gospel of Luke. Help me to journey faithfully toward Jerusalem with Jesus.

Read the introduction to Luke on page 12 and the Bible text of Luke 12–13 found in the outside columns of pages 13–21, highlighting what stands out to you.

Read the accompanying commentary to add to your understanding.

Respond to the questions on pages 22–23, Exploring Lesson One.

The closing prayer on page 24 is for your personal use and may be used at the end of group discussion.
Lesson One

INTRODUCTION


Luke is the longest of the four Gospels in the New Testament and it contains a number of Jesus’ beloved parables that are found in no other gospel. Two of Jesus’ best known parables are found in the second half of Luke: the parable of the son who squandered his inheritance only to be received back with great joy by his father, and the parable concerning poor Lazarus and the rich man who perpetually ignored him.

Whether or not you participated in the study of the first half of Luke, it is appropriate here to identify some of the pertinent themes of Luke that appeared in the first half of the study and that continue to be of importance as they re-present themselves in the second half. In his introduction to Luke, Michael Patella stresses four primary themes, or motifs, found throughout Luke.

First, Christ and his many miracles are depicted as a victorious force against the power of evil, personified in Satan.

Second, the coming of Christ into the world inaugurates God’s plan to impose a great reversal in world affairs. The hungry will feast and the rich will grow hungry. The humble of the earth will be exalted while the mighty and the proud will be brought low.

Third, the motif of schism, the separation of people into opposing camps, is shown to be the inevitable result of Christ’s teaching and activity. He offers God’s embrace to all but a decision must be made to accept or reject his message, sharply dividing people in their response to him.

Finally, Patella says Luke’s Gospel is riddled with joy. Those who accept Jesus’ message and experience God’s embrace are filled with great joy. For Luke, joy is the enduring mark of Christians.
CHAPTER 12
The Leaven of the Pharisees

Meanwhile, so many people were crowding together that they were trampling one another underfoot. He began to speak, first to his disciples, “Beware of the leaven—that is, the hypocrisy—of the Pharisees.

Courage under Persecution

There is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known.

Therefore whatever you have said in the darkness will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be proclaimed on the housetops.

I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body but after that can do no more.

I shall show you whom to fear. Be afraid of the one who after killing has the power to cast into Gehenna; yes, I tell you, be afraid of that one.

Are not five sparrows sold for two small coins? Yet not one of them has escaped the notice of God.

Even the hairs of your head have all been counted. Do not be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows.

I tell you, every one who acknowledges me before others the Son of Man will acknowledge before the angels of God.

But whoever denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God.

Sayings about the Holy Spirit

“Everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but the one who blasphemes against the holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

The sin against the holy Spirit is the refusal of God’s mercy and forgiveness when it is offered. Here, too, by having the choice to accept or reject the love of Christ, we have a role in determining our salvation.

Not even denying Christ in the face of danger and threat will bring eternal condemnation; only a sin against the holy Spirit has that power.

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit has been the subject of many and varied interpretations in history. In the context of Luke and Acts, it constitutes resistance to the Spirit-empowered spread of the Gospel. To stand in the way of God’s plan brings doom.

In verse 4 Jesus calls his disciples, and possibly by extension the rest of the people, “friends.” This is the only occurrence in all three Synoptic Gospels in which we see this form of address applied to Jesus’ followers, and it is another example of a tradition Luke seems to share with John (see John 15:14-15).

In a time of persecution, people generally go into hiding and maintain a secret existence. Jesus’ admonition describes a situation in which no hiding will be possible, even if it were desirable. True fear should be reserved for the One who can cast a believer into Gehenna after the body is dead (v. 5). This phrase serves as a circumlocution emphasizing that we need fear only God.

“Gehenna” is a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew Hinnom, the name of the valley on the western side of Jerusalem. Often cursed by the Jewish prophets for the child sacrifice that the Jerusalemites practiced there, it is also called Topheth (see 2 Kgs 23:10; Jer 7:31-32; 19:6, 11-14). In time, the Valley of Hinnom functioned as the city garbage dump, thereby making it ritually unclean. In both Jewish and Christian canonical and deuterocanonical texts, Gehenna is the metaphor for hell. As Jesus makes plain in other parts of his ministry, we have a hand in determining our salvation by opting to participate in God’s grace. He emphasizes that our salvation lies beyond the reach of any persecutor.

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit has been the subject of many and varied interpretations in history. In the context of Luke and Acts, it constitutes resistance to the Spirit-empowered spread of the Gospel. To stand in the way of God’s plan brings doom.
and before rulers and authorities, do not worry about how or what your defense will be or about what you are to say. For the holy Spirit will teach you at that moment what you should say.”

**Saying against Greed**

13 Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to share the inheritance with me.”
14 He replied to him, “Friend, who appointed me as your judge and arbitrator?”
15 Then he said to the crowd, “Take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one’s life does not consist of possessions.”

**Parable of the Rich Fool**

16 Then he told them a parable. “There was a rich man whose land produced a bountiful harvest.
17 He asked himself, ‘What shall I do, for I do not have space to store my harvest?’
18 And he said, ‘This is what I shall do: I shall tear down my barns and build larger ones. There I shall store all my grain and other goods and I shall say to myself, ‘Now as for you, you have so many good things stored up for many years, rest, eat, drink, be merry!’”
19 But God said to him, ‘You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?’
20 Thus will it be for the one who stores up treasure for himself but is not rich in what matters to God.”

God will not abandon those facing the sword. The holy Spirit will not only be present in fortifying the witnesses to Jesus but will also direct them in their actions and speak on their behalf, as Luke demonstrates in the Acts of the Apostles.

12:13-21 Greed and riches

This section consists of a dialogue followed by a parable. The first half, prompted by someone in the crowd calling out to Jesus, succinctly presents Jesus’ true role and ministry while offering an ethical and eschatological lesson.

The person who calls out from the crowd misunderstands Jesus’ mission. The person errs by viewing Jesus as an arbiter whose judgment rests on interpreting the intricacies of a legal code. Jesus refuses to be cast in such a position, and he turns the table on the questioner as well as the brother. The issue, Jesus implies, is not who is right or wrong about the inheritance; it is about greed and avarice. If both exhibited less covetousness, one would be inclined to share with the other, and the other would not suspect that he was being cheated. Jesus’ ministry is to the lost, and both brothers are sinners. His action allows the two to receive his message. No one loses, and both have the opportunity to enter the kingdom. The parable of the rich fool, which follows (vv. 16-21), illustrates the lesson.

At no point in his discourse does the rich fool credit God for the harvest. Furthermore, he never acknowledges that the bounty should have some purpose other than satisfying his own desires. Because he is so selfish and self-centered, he dies without benefit of both his wealth and God’s love. With this parable, Jesus warns the two brothers to guard against ending up like the rich fool—a total loser. An example of how bad it will be for someone like this individual is found in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31).
Lesson One

12:22-34 Trust and faith in God

Matthew places this discourse within the Sermon on the Mount (see Matt 6:25-34), while Luke situates it on the journey to Jerusalem. Nonetheless, the lesson is the same: God’s love is so abundant that he looks after every human need. In Luke, this passage provides the proper frame of mind and heart that stands in contrast to the focus of the rich fool seen above (vv. 16-21).

The Greek korax, translated here as “ravens” (v. 24), can also mean “crow”; in any case, it refers to a scavenger. Not only was such a creature forbidden as food to Jews, but it was considered a disgusting bird also among Gentile Greeks. Its repulsive character, therefore, makes the comparison all the more striking. Using the rhetorical form of the comparison of the greater, the listener or reader understands that if God tends to the needs of a repugnant carrion-eater, how much more will he care for his beloved people (see also Ps 147:9 and Job 38:41).

This same type of comparison is employed further on in the passage with the flowers, called krinon in Greek. Most probably it is the crocus, referred to in other parts of the Bible as the “flower of Sharon” (Song 2:1). Against the green Galilean hillsides in rainy times of the year, these blossoms give a dazzling appearance. Yet the spectacular color of the grass and flowers is short-lived. As soon as the weather turns warm, both the herbage and the blooms shrivel up. In a land with little wood, dried grass is often used for fuel. Once again we hear the comparison of the greater. If God shows so much attention to what ends up in the fire, how much more does he care for his people (see also Ps 147:9 and Job 38:41).

Luke introduces a social justice theme not paralleled in Matthew’s version. The “inexhaustible treasure in heaven” (v. 33) comes from almsgiving. Luke underscores the lesson of the discourse with verse 34. If we make ourselves rich in the eyes of God, our hearts and motivation will lead to union with God both in this life and the life to come. Furthermore, by becoming rich in heaven, we relieve ourselves of earthly anxiety.

12:35-48 The need for vigilance

The metaphors for vigilance all make the same point: the Lord’s coming, or parousia, will happen when we least expect it. Each of the examples, however, gives a variety of views of what one can expect.
he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds vigilant on his arrival. Amen, I say to you, he will gird himself, have them recline at table, and proceed to wait on them. And should he come in the second or third watch and find them prepared in this way, blessed are those servants. Be sure of this: if the master of the house had known the hour when the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.”

Then Peter said, “Lord, is this parable meant for us or for everyone?” And the Lord replied, “Who, then, is the faithful and prudent steward whom the master will put in charge of his servants to distribute [the] food allowance at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master on arrival finds doing so. Truly, I say to you, he will put him in charge of all his property. But if that servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed in coming,’ and begins to beat the menservants and the maidservants, to eat and drink and get drunk, then that servant’s master will come on an unexpected day and at an unknown hour and will punish him severely and assign him a place with the unfaithful. That servant who knew his master’s will but did not make preparations nor act in accord with his will shall be beaten severely; and the servant who was ignorant of his master’s will but acted in a way deserving of a severe beating shall be beaten only lightly. Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more.

Jesus: A Cause of Division

I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing! There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished! Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on a household of five will be divided, three

A master returning from a wedding would come with his bride (vv. 35-38). There would be feasting and celebration associated with the homecoming, which the servants should be ready to facilitate. In a role reversal, this master serves the servants. So too will it be at the eschatological banquet, when Jesus will be the host. The Lord’s coming will arrive with the shock and surprise of a nighttime thief breaking into a house.

The notion of preparation introduces a paradox: this passage seems to contradict the parable of the rich fool (12:16-21). There readers are told not to worry about the morrow, food, or clothing, but here they are admonished not to take anything for granted, but to be ready for the unexpected. The paradox lies in the fact that adequate preparation is the result of letting go of worldly concerns and values. The prepared person will not be attached to the concerns of this life, even though she may be immersed in the midst of them.

The parable of the wise and just servant likewise has a strain of irony running through it (vv. 42-48). A good foreman will not take advantage of those under him, and if he does, the master will depose him upon his return. Such a punishment, however, is reserved only for the servant who knew his master’s will and acted shamefully. The servant who does not know the master’s will and commits the same actions will get off with a lighter punishment. The parable is a lesson in discipleship that parallels Luke 19:11-27. Followers of Christ will be held to a higher standard than nonbelievers.

12:49-59 Division, signs, conduct

Although this section appears to come from Q, verses 49-50 are found only in Luke’s Gospel. The evangelist wishes to underscore that discipleship is not without its price, and the world will not gladly welcome the kingdom of God. Fire and water are both elements of destruction and cleansing, and as harsh as the imagery may seem, Luke uses them here to show the immediacy and totality of the impending eschaton. The more specific examples of how Christ’s message will be received (vv. 51-53)
depict a situation in the early church, most probably within the Jewish-Christian synagogues from which the Christians were eventually expelled.

In Israel and Palestine, rain can only come from the Mediterranean and only in the winter, hence the reference to the west wind (v. 54). Similarly, the Sahara, Sinai, and Arabian deserts lie in the south and are the source of the hot, desiccating breeze (v. 55). The signs of the times should be just as obvious.

This discourse works on several levels. The historical signs are the political precariousness of the Jewish state during the intertestamental epoch: Roman occupation, political dissension, and corrupt administration threatened the society to the point of anarchy. On the religious front, the signs of the times were Jesus’ ministry (see Luke 4:16-21). These signs are the same no matter what the period in history. Issues of social justice coupled with the religious and spiritual emptiness are signs pointing to the eschatological reign. The Christian is called to respond to them.

The section ends with instruction to the early Christian community itself (vv. 57-59). As a people baptized in Christ’s name, they should settle differences within the community and not resort to the pagan law courts. Christians have a new standard of behavior that encompasses personal behavior as well as ways of resolving injustices. These standards extend beyond restitution and include mercy, redemption, and forgiveness. Such an interpretation does not mean covering up shameful or wrongful behavior behind a cloak of secrecy; rather, it means making the community a living symbol of justice and reconciliation (see Matt 5:25-26).

13:1-9 *Sin and repentance*

The incident involving Pilate referred to here is one of the few places where he is mentioned outside the passion narratives, and it is very telling.

Many see Pontius Pilate as a weak, vacillating governor who feels overwhelmed by the vagaries of the mob, and, against his better against two and two against three; a father will be divided against his son and a son against his father, a mother against her daughter and a daughter against her mother, a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.”

*Signs of the Times*

He also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west you say immediately that it is going to rain—and so it does; and when you notice that the wind is blowing from the south you say that it is going to be hot—and so it is. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky; why do you not know how to interpret the present time?

*Settlement with an Opponent*

“Why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? If you are to go with your opponent before a magistrate, make an effort to settle the matter on the way; otherwise your opponent will turn you over to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the constable, and the constable throw you into prison. I say to you, you will not be released until you have paid the last penny.”

**CHAPTER 13**

*A Call to Repentance*

At that time some people who were present there told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with the blood of their sacrifices. He said to them in reply, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were greater sinners than all other Galileans? By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did! Or those eighteen people who were killed when the tower at Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than everyone else who lived in Jerusalem? By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did!” continue
The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree

6 And he told them this parable: “There once was a person who had a fig tree planted in his orchard, and when he came in search of fruit on it but found none, 7 he said to the gardener, ‘For three years now I have come in search of fruit on this fig tree but have found none. [So] cut it down. Why should it exhaust the soil?’ 8 He said to him in reply, ‘Sir, leave it for this year also, and I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it; 9 it may bear fruit in the future. If not you can cut it down.’ ”

Cure of a Crippled Woman on the Sabbath

10 He was teaching in a synagogue on the sabbath. 11 And a woman was there who for eighteen years had been crippled by a spirit; she was bent over, completely incapable of standing erect. 12 When Jesus saw her, he called to her and said, “Woman, you are set free of your infirmity.” 13 He continue

The lesson that Jesus draws from these events releases human suffering from the capricious judgment of wrathful gods, where many of then contemporary pagan cults had placed it, or even from known or unknown sinful behavior, as many in the Jewish religious establishment then taught. Instead, Jesus is saying that suffering comes to good and bad alike, and that all humankind stands in need of repentance and redemption. Someone’s misfortune is not an indicator of moral culpability. John’s Gospel (9:2) features a similar lesson in the healing of the person born blind (see also Ps 7:12-13).

With the parable of the fig tree (vv. 6-9), Luke employs a graceful thematic continuity from the stress on repentance to the value of the sinner. The fig tree is highly prized for the luscious texture and sweetness of its fruit (see Judg 9:10-11; 1 Kgs 5:5; 2 Kgs 18:31). Furthermore, the fruit can be dried and preserved for years on end.

The inedible variety of figs looks exactly like the edible kind. Moreover, edible figs can only be pollinated by the female fig wasp (Blastophaga psenes), which carries the pollen from the inedible fig and burrows into the buds of the edible one. Hence, for proper cultivation both types of fig trees are necessary. This delicate operation can confuse even the best gardeners, and patience is necessary to ensure a good harvest of the precious fruit. The lesson is that God will not give up on those who struggle with turning toward him. In addition, the great value placed on the fig tree characterizes the value of the sinner in God’s eyes—not a reprobate or an outcast, but a prized possession, despite the possibility that the sinner may never “bear fruit.”

13:10-17 The cure of the crippled woman on the sabbath

If Jesus was teaching in the synagogue, he must have originally met with respect from the synagogue leader. In fact, the leader rebukes not Jesus but the crowd of people who seemingly have come on the sabbath to be cured. The cause of the leader’s discomfort,
therefore, is not that Jesus cured but that this curing occurred on the Lord’s Day. Healing was seen as work and therefore prohibited. Jesus uses this opportunity to make several points about his identity, his reign, and the world.

The Jewish sabbath, since it commemorates the seventh day on which God rested from all his labors, is literally the Lord’s Day. Because of the holy character of the sabbath, the regulations against work were intended to give everyone access to this life in the Lord. Judging from Jesus’ response, it appears that in this situation, the sabbath regulations had ceased to provide the spiritual renewal that originally had been associated with them. Jesus’ challenge to the custom is successful only because of his authority. He thus gives the sabbath an eschatological dimension. Access to life in the Lord now becomes a foretaste of the heavenly realm, where sin and suffering are put to rout. This interpretation is evident in Jesus’ reply (v. 16).

The reference to Satan in verse 16, combined with the setting of the cure on the sabbath, characterizes a central aspect of Lukan eschatology. Sickness and malady are viewed as a part of Satan’s malevolent realm, which has made inroads into God’s creation. Jesus’ role is to redeem creation, to win it back for God. Jesus overpowers the evil forces and ushers in the eschatological reign. No longer dominated by Satan, the crippled woman now has her sabbath rest.

13:18-19 The parable of the mustard seed

All three Synoptics show this parable. The mustard seed was considered the smallest of all possible seeds. The tree itself, the brassica nigra, grows wild throughout Palestine and Israel, but farmers also cultivate it. With small, bright yellow flowers and slender, dark green leaves, it can grow to a large, many-branched shrub or tree. As such, it is a metaphor for the small early Christian community, which has an influence on the world going far beyond its size and number to the point that others (symbolized by birds) make their home in it.

13:20-21 The measure of yeast

This parable appears only in Matthew and Luke. The bread of the time would have been sourdough, as most bread was until the development of dry yeast. Once the dough was kneaded, pieces were pulled away, flattened, and laid over a hot metal dome called a tamboun. The result was a large, circular crêpe or pita.

Not much yeast was needed to cause a batch of dough to rise, so, like the parable of...
The Narrow Door; Salvation and Rejection

22 He passed through towns and villages, teaching as he went and making his way to Jerusalem. Someone asked him, “Lord, will only a few people be saved?” He answered them, “Strive to enter through the narrow door, for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough. After the master of the house has arisen and locked the door, then will you stand outside knocking and saying, ‘Lord, open the door for us.’ He will say to you in reply, ‘I do not know where...”

the mustard seed, the leaven stands as a measure for the Christian community. In this parable the woman who adds the yeast to the flour is the Christ figure.

What kind of yeast did the ancient Israelites use to leaven their bread? Usually, they made a type of sourdough bread, in which fermented dough from a previous batch of bread provided the leavening agent to make a new batch of bread rise. But during the feast of unleavened bread, all leavening agents were to be removed from the house (see Exod 12:15). In order to make new leavened bread following the feast of unleavened bread, more than one strategy could be employed. One would be to use some fruit juice in place of water alone to make dough, which would quickly ferment and create a new batch of sour dough. Another strategy would be to simply acquire leaven from a non-Jewish neighbor or merchant. Eventually, even unleavened dough left over from the feast of unleavened bread, perhaps stored in an earthen jar to preserve its moisture, would naturally ferment, providing a continuing source of leaven (wild yeast and lactobacilli).

13:22-30 The narrow door, salvation, and rejection

With this parable Jesus indirectly answers the question put to him. Restrictions to entering the kingdom do not lie with God but with the human response to the divine invitation. Because Luke recapitulates the point that Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem (v. 22), many consider this section as the beginning of the second half of the journey narrative leading to the city of his death and resurrection.

The conventional city gate during this period had one wide, high central arch flanked by two lower, narrower portals. The main arch permitted camels, carts, and goods to pass. Those who wished to enter and who had no baggage trains could avoid the traffic by walking through either one of the narrow gates.

Applying this daily occurrence to the parable, the lesson seems to be directed to those who drag along their religious or social status, their material possessions, or their own ambitions in seeking easy access to salvation. Jesus counters this attitude by extracting a lesson from a familiar scene. Just as today those who travel light reach their destination more easily than those with much luggage, so too will those who keep their eyes and actions on salvation find the swifter path through the smaller doors. Any attempt to interpret these verses as showing that Gentiles are saved at the expense of the Jews is based on a faulty reading. The setting of the story is Jesus’ trip to Jerusalem accompanied by his Jewish disciples, but the Lukan community to whom this story is told is composed mostly of Gentiles. All are instructed, therefore, to enter by the narrow gate, a passage that is difficult but not impossible.

The introduction of mixed metaphors in verses 25-30 is a result of various strands of tradition redacted into one parable. The second lesson is similar to the first: one should not rely on status to enter the kingdom. To use a modern parallel, ticket holders who arrive for a concert at the last minute may still not get in if there is a long line at the gate; their reliance on their ticket stubs proves to be no guarantee of entry. If they had been earnest in their desire,
they would have arrived early and waited in line to be sure of getting a seat.

13:31-33 The Pharisees warn about Herod
Do the Pharisees come to Jesus as friends and allies, or are they simply trying to frighten Jesus into submission? In either case, Jesus does not alter his intention to head to Jerusalem. Indeed, he uses the occasion to affirm it—he must go to Jerusalem (v. 33).

Lukan eschatology once again surfaces with the blending of three statements in verse 32. As in the parable of the crippled woman (13:10-17), curing the sick is seen as a successful assault on demonic forces. Furthermore, contained in this statement is a reference to Jesus’ passion, death, and resurrection: “On the third day I accomplish my purpose” (v. 32). Jesus predicts his own death with his emphatic resolution to continue to Jerusalem, though, ironically, by traveling to Jerusalem he leaves Herod’s jurisdiction.

13:34-35 The lament over Jerusalem
This passage, a rhetorical apostrophe, flows from the scene with the Pharisees immediately above and is a fine example of Luke’s narrative finesse. Matthew’s Gospel contains a parallel account, but in that Gospel Jesus utters these words after the triumphant entry into Jerusalem (see Matt 23:37-39).

In 13:33 Jesus says that a prophet should not die outside Jerusalem. His words over the city have him identifying with that destiny, and he does so by using a lament, a prophetic genre seen most clearly in Jeremiah and Lamentations. To be sure, prophets were also slain outside Jerusalem, but given the presence of the temple within the city and the city’s history with the prophets, Jeremiah and Isaiah make Jerusalem the major symbol of a prophet’s destiny (see 1 Kgs 9:7-8; 2 Kgs 21:16; Ps 118:2; Jer 22:5).

you are from.’ 26 And you will say, ‘We ate and drank in your company and you taught in our streets.’ 27 Then he will say to you, ‘I do not know where [you] are from. Depart from me, all you evildoers!’ 28 And there will be wailing and grinding of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves cast out. 29 And people will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God. 30 For behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”

Herod’s Desire to Kill Jesus
31 At that time some Pharisees came to him and said, “Go away, leave this area because Herod wants to kill you.” 32 He replied, “Go and tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and I perform healings today and tomorrow, and on the third day I accomplish my purpose. 33 Yet I must continue on my way today, tomorrow, and the following day, for it is impossible that a prophet should die outside of Jerusalem.’

The Lament over Jerusalem
34 “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how many times I yearned to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were unwilling!

In verse 34 the reader should note the feminine imagery inherent in Jesus’ self-referential term “hen” (see also Deut 32:11). Contained also is the allusion to his entering the city in 19:28-40.
EXPLORING LESSON ONE

1. In what ways have you been personally challenged to acknowledge Jesus before others (12:2-9)?

2. Considering the ways you invest your time, energy, and money, what do you see as you value most in life (12:13-34)? (See Matt 6:33; Gal 5:22.)

3. How has God asked you to serve others (12:35-48)? In what ways are you challenged to be vigilant in your service?

4. Where have you seen or experienced division or contention arising from faithfulness to Christ (12:49-53)?

5. How has your faith led you to respond or react to tragic events in the world (13:1-5)? Think of some concrete examples.
6. a) What do you think the parable of the barren fig tree says about God’s patience (13:6-9)?

b) Where in your life is your own patience being developed?

7. Jesus compares the expansion of God’s kingdom to both the growth of a mustard seed and the effect of yeast in bread dough (13:18-21). To what would you compare the development of faith in your own life?

8. The commentary states that entering salvation through the narrow gate is difficult but not impossible. What does it mean to you to strive to enter through the narrow gate (13:22-30)?

9. In both the parable of the yeast (13:20-21) and when Jesus weeps over Jerusalem (13:34-35) he uses feminine imagery to describe his ministry. In what ways have you experienced God’s love as something maternal or feminine? (See Luke 15:8-10; 1 Thess 2:7; Sir 14:20–15:6; Isa 66:13.)
CLOSING PRAYER

Prayer

“Woman you are set free of your infirmity.”
(Luke 13:12)

You teach us, Jesus, that you desire wholeness and freedom for each of us. Your word has the power to heal and liberate. We pray now for those in our families and neighborhoods who need to hear your healing voice, especially those we name . . .