

# Seeking Spirituality

- That which gives me an experience of
  - beauty
  - meaning
  - peace
  - connectedness beyond myself
  - Connectedness with the all
- This is SO popular, for Christians and those who aren't

# Jesus isn't feeling real "spiritual" here...

Luke 9:57-62 (NRSV)

As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

# Critical Scholars

- No one doubts the authenticity of these two verses
  - Because to Jesus' listeners this is one of the most offensive things he ever said!

# Hard-line literalists

- Can you take this verse literally?
- Is Jesus advocating that we
  - Not care for aging parents?
  - Allow human corpses to rot and be eaten by stray or wild animals?
  - That Christians abandon the funeral industry to zombies?

# “Family Values” interpreters

- Lots of ways of taking the edge off this passage
  - “The man’s father was just old...”
  - “The spiritually dead...”
  - “Jesus was on his last trip (to Jerusalem) so this is an isolated incident...”
  - This is only for preachers...

It has become common in the church to elevate family over all other values.

- Conservative American religious cultures are doing this to resist individualist self-discovery values in our culture
- Traditional and ancient cultures (many Asian and African cultures today) value family (with applications) even higher than conservative American religious cultures.

# Jesus regularly relativizes it (makes it non-absolute)

Luke 8:19-21 (NRSV)

Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. And he was told, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you." But he said to them, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it."

# Jesus regularly relativizes it (makes it non-absolute)

Luke 14:26 (NRSV)

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

# This is hard and harsh!

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# For this religious, cultural context, there were no higher duties

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# 10 Commandments

Exodus 20:12 (NRSV)

Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

Burying the dead was SO important you were permitted to become ceremonially unclean and you had to separate from the community afterwards.

# Old Testament Precedent!

1 Kings 19:19-21 (NRSV)

So he set out from there, and found Elisha son of Shaphat, who was plowing. There were twelve yoke of oxen ahead of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle over him. He left the oxen, ran after Elijah, and said, "Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." Then Elijah said to him, "Go back again; for what have I done to you?" He returned from following him, took the yoke of oxen, and slaughtered them; using the equipment from the oxen, he boiled their flesh, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out and followed Elijah, and became his servant.

# If this were a legal case

- Someone countering Jesus could claim Moses and Elijah (who were just with him at the transfiguration earlier in the chapter) as witnesses against Jesus' now claimed position!
  - They would argue that this excuse is valid if any excuse at all be valid!

# THAT'S the point!

- The proclamation of the kingdom is of the ultimate priority!
  - Over family duties
  - Over obligations to the poor
  - Over religious service obligations
  - Over political claims on one's life

# Dangerous for preachers

- It is easy to twist this passage and make whatever priority the pastor has and wants to hook you all into ultimate
  - And this is done plenty in churches

# What is Jesus really saying here...

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# Biblical "Ages"

## The Age of Decay

- Loss of life
- Loss of relationships
- Loss of stability
- Loss of identity

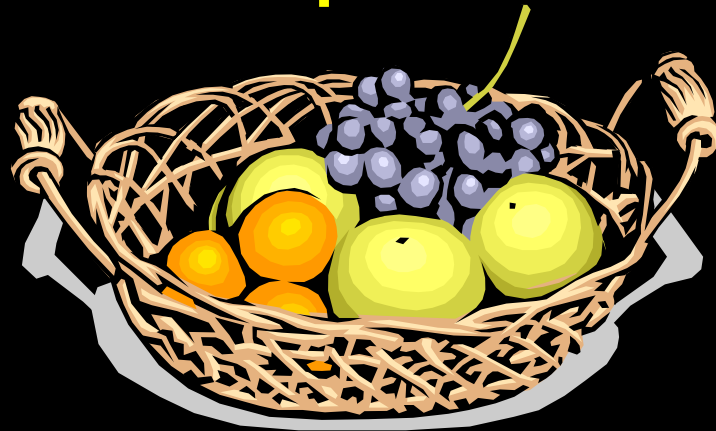
## The Life of the Age to Come

- "your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven"
- Luke: Kingdom of God
- Matt: Kingdom of heaven
- John: Eternal life (lit: "life of the age")
- Paul: "In Christ"

# When we heard “proclaim the kingdom of God”

- We heard a narrow, religious obligation that
  - Helps people be more moral, be “better”
  - Helps people feel more “spiritual”:  
experience meaning, beauty, hope
  - Is just one item on life’s “to do” list
  - Is one aspect of a “healthy, balanced” life

Apart from the kingdom of God  
everything else is just  
rearranging the basket of fruit in  
the age of decay all of which has  
a very limited shelf life and the  
rotting of which no power of ours  
can prevent.



# Make any of these your “life”



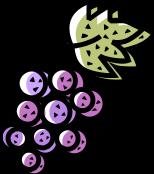
Family, children, marriage, relationships



Career, fame, popularity, “being a good person”



Money, power, prestige, achievement



Morality, doctrinal purity, religious observance



Service of the poor, works of charity, social justice

“let the dead bury their own  
dead”

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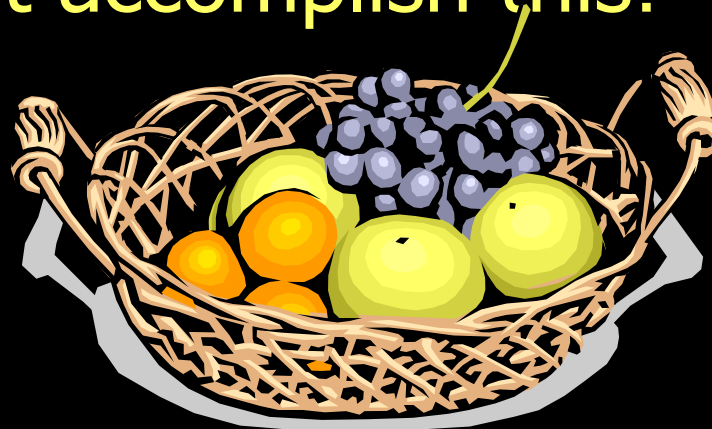
You are opting to manage the age of decay  
rather than to live into the age to come

“Cut to the chase already, tell me what Jesus says I need to do!”

- Do I need to be a preacher?
- Do I need to get a bullhorn and a sandwich board and shout at people?
- Do I need to do acts of mercy in a St. Francis “preach the gospel, use words if necessary” sort of way?
- Give me the bottom line!

# The bad news

- You will be continually sidetracked, tempted, distracted, unfocused, anxious, faithless, harried by your basket of fruit
- You can't accomplish this!



# The good news

- There is one who has in fact accomplished it for you!
- This is why he says “proclaim”, not nag/coerce/manipulate/assault, etc.
- This is good news, not good advice

# “It is accomplished”

- When he was accomplishing it for them his disciples were in terror that their little baskets were all being crushed

# The Result

- Only after realizing what he accomplished (and at what cost) were they actually able to regard the fruit
  - as gifts of God to be stewarded
  - To be properly valued (not over valued)
  - To really love (to give) rather than to lust after (to derive identity and life from)

# This man was a slave

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He felt pulled between the religious duty to care for his father and the religious duty to follow this rabbi and he thought he had to make a religious or cultural choice

# Jesus invites us into true freedom

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We can't start loving our fathers until we no longer have to try to save ourselves (dignity, identity, morality, reputation) THROUGH our fathers because of our true brother.

# “Pastor, be simple with me!”

- Realize your basket of fruit is going to spoil and there's nothing you can do about it

# “Pastor, be simple with me!”

- Realize your basket of fruit is going to spoil and there’s nothing you can do about it
- Realize that your true brother at the cost of his life has delivered you from your need to keep and manage your fruit to save your “self”

# “Pastor, be simple with me!”

- Being freed from that “need” you return to your “fruit” (father, others, everything in the age of decay) ready to simply love and serve even at great cost, not from obligation, but from joy.
  - You can “bury your father” as love rather than duty.