

Where Your Heart Is
Psalm 19:7-10; Matthew 6:19-21
November 8, 2020
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I love the story of the man who arrived at heaven's gate with a wheelbarrow loaded with gold bars. St. Peter said, "You can't bring that in. Everyone who comes in here must come as empty handed as when they were born." The man fell on his knees and pleaded that his request be appealed to God. In a moment of indulgent kindness, St. Peter consulted God about the man's request to bring gold bars into heaven. God answered with a simple question, "Why does he want to bring paving materials into heaven?"

Our most valued earthly possessions will be seen as mere "paving materials" when we get to heaven. We won't be allowed to bring them in. Yet, these same gifts, generously given while on the earth, can "pave the way" for our church and God's ministry here.

Everything we own will be left behind one day when we meet God face to face. So why not give generously of your resources today, before we have to let go of them anyway? I rather imagine it would bring much happiness and joy to our hearts to see what our gifts are able to do right here in our own church and community while we are still live.

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It has been a challenging year in every sense, and yet the ministry of the church has continued, and lives continue to be touched, thanks to your care and compassion for others. This stewardship season is more challenging than most.

While our giving through offerings has come in as expected, the rental income from our tenants has been down considerably due to covid. With your generosity next year, the work and ministry of the church can continue to flourish, regardless of what happens with covid. With this in mind what can we learn from Jesus and the bible when it comes to generosity and giving?

Jesus spoke frequently about money and material possessions in the NT. The Bible contains more than 500 references to prayers and almost 500 references to faith, but there are more than 2,000 references to money and possessions. Of Jesus' parables, 16 out of 38 deal with how we handle our money and possessions.

Jesus said more about money and possessions than about heaven and hell combined. There are 288 verses in the New Testament pertaining to money and possessions.

In one of the many parables that Jesus told about money and material wealth, he spoke of a rich fool, a farmer, who, in the midst of plenty, wanted still more. Jesus said:

‘The land of a rich man produced abundantly. ¹⁷And he thought to himself, “What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?”

¹⁸Then he said, “I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”
Luke 12:17-19

But that night the voice of God came rattling through the walls, announcing to him:

“You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” ²¹So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.’ Luke 12:20-21

Sometimes people are tempted to build bigger barns or houses to hold it all. Even if they don’t have much, they can devote their entire lives to the treasured illusion that they would be fine if only they had a little more.

But Jesus tells us that such thinking is misguided. He knew that what we treasure would also be the focus of our hearts and minds. The point of today's text is that earthly treasures will not last, but our treasure in God’s hands will last forever.

Today we have an opportunity to focus on treasures that will last. Jesus said, “...Store up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consume, and where thieves do not break in and steal.” (Mt 6:20)

God has already given much treasure to us. What might some of these treasures be? We can begin to enjoy heavenly treasures right now – treasures such as God’s unconditional love for us; the grace that is freely extended to us on a daily basis, a grace that allows us to forgive ourselves and others, because God forgives us, and the companionship of the Holy Spirit who intercedes in our lives with a Christ-like presence.

Another treasure that lasts and the one we are focusing on today is our generosity towards God – what we give back to God. Nothing that we give to God is ever lost or wasted. That seems to be another aspect of what Jesus means when he says, “...store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.”

Jesus says something else interesting that underscores our attitudes and allegiance to things. "Wherever your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Jesus has made it clear that sooner or later, your treasure and your heart always end up in the same place. He is clear that we cannot serve two masters.

Now in today's lesson, Jesus isn't telling us to give up all of our treasures. Rather, he is telling us to stop holding on tight. Stop being anxious, and allow God to multiply your treasure by placing it in God's hands. That is the only way our treasure can last.

In the hands of God, all of our earthly treasures are transformed into testaments of God's power, love and grace. Just look at what God can do when we trust and put our lives and possessions in God's hands.

In the hands of God, a sling shot killed a giant . . . a shepherd's staff parted the Red Sea . . . and a 90-year-old woman gave birth. In the hands of God, fishermen became fishers of men and women . . . a persecutor became an apostle, and a few loaves and a single fish fed over 5,000 hungry people.

Through God, the treasure you hold now can be transformed and used to sustain the church and the community. That the grace of God is waiting to do that with your life is very clear. Your life is not an accident. It was created for holy purposes. You are called to be a good steward over what you have. It is up to each person to decide how they will work in partnership with God.

Perhaps this is a year more than others when we have had to let go . . . to let go of things we cannot control. We cannot control covid. We cannot control when there will be a vaccine or successful treatment. We cannot control when things will get back to normal. We have had to let go of the illusion that we are in charge. But the best thing for us to do when we let go is to let God take our hand. It is true of our possessions and it is true of our life. We know what God is holding onto. God is holding onto us.

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Take a deep breath, and experience God's peace. In the coming weeks, you will be asked to decide how much you are willing to give of the money and resources that have been entrusted to you, and how much you are willing to share in God's work, not just during the stewardship season, but every day. God is always giving to us. God's giving is never out of season. The same should be true for us.

It has been a tough year. Since the church was shut down in March due to Covid, the church has lost much rental income from other churches and groups that rent the building. Your generosity would go a long way in helping to fill the gap.

The church has continued to reach out to members in need. When worship was shut down in March due to covid, we quickly found a way to bring a worship experience into homes. Small group gatherings are held over Zoom, and the care team continues to reach out to shut-in members. The Mission Committee continues to help people in the community. We have held outdoor worship services, and we are planning a Christmas Eve service.

Please give your prayerful and financial support to the church as best you can in the coming year. Your pledges are appreciated as well as any special one-time gifts. You can also donate stock that has appreciated in value.

I imagine this is not the first time this church has faced lean times and challenges, and it won't be the last. But we are standing on the shoulders of all those who came before us in this place -- spiritual giants who stepped up to the plate to right the ship, and made sure the church would be there for another generation. We can do no less.

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I would like to end with the following story. The pastor and teacher Eric Law writes and preaches about stewardship. In his book, Holy Currencies, he writes about a memorable experience when he was a child. He writes that when he was a child, his family always had guests for dinner. On any given day, there might be twelve to fifteen people at the dinner table. Dinner was a time of joyful sharing of food and stories. Law says he thought they were wealthy, feeding so many people on many nights.

Only when he was older, while talking to his mother about the good old days did he find out that they were not rich at all. In fact, they were quite poor. His mother told him that some days she only had three dollars to feed fifteen people. "How could that be," he wondered?

He could not remember a day when there was not enough food to go around. Law says what his mother did with three dollars was a miracle. She knew what to buy and when. She shopped the sales. She knew how to bargain. She made meals that were less expensive, with ingredients like rice, beans, and pasta. She made good use of leftovers. Often guests brought a dish to share.

But there was more. She would often quote the bible. She was fond of the story of Jesus multiplying the loaves and fishes, the parable of the mustard seed, and the widow with two coins. Still, Law says, the sum always ended up being greater than the parts. There was still much he could not explain.

I think we can take a tip from Eric's mother, and of course, take a tip from God. God can take a little, and make it into a lot. Like the guests around the table, maybe we can bring a little extra to the table to share next year, and even as we end this year. But most of all, let us not forget the God who has always been faithful and generous to us, and now invites us to do the same. Amen.

Psalm 19:1-10

⁷ The law of the Lord is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the decrees of the Lord are sure,
making wise the simple;
⁸ the precepts of the Lord are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is clear,
enlightening the eyes;
⁹ the fear of the Lord is pure,
enduring for ever;
the ordinances of the Lord are true
and righteous altogether.
¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey,
and drippings of the honeycomb.

Matthew 6:19-21

19 'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.