

TREASURE

When I was in Seminary, I had to take a course in Pastoral Care. The course included some time in the classroom and some clinical work in the hospitals. One of our class sessions was on dealing with grief and loss. The instructor gave us an exercise. He asked us to make a list of the things and people we valued the most. We were then instructed to cross three things off the list.

The instructor chose one of the students, a woman who was a friend of mine, and asked her to share what she had crossed off the list. She responded that she couldn't choose. She hadn't crossed off a single thing. The instructor smiled, picked up a pen and said, "I'm not really looking here." He then crossed three things off her list. Her response was "Wait! No! You can't do that!" He smiled and said, "Did you hear that cry of grief?"

I want to encourage you to think for a moment about the same exercise. If you had to make list of the people and things that you valued most, what would your list contain? Think about that list.

Today, we hear Jesus talking about treasure. What is it that we value most? It's worth looking back at the section just prior to this. Jesus is approached by a man who asks him to tell his brother to divide his inheritance with him. He then tells the parable of the rich fool, which we talked about a week or so ago. Then he teaches us not to worry about things; consider the ravens; they neither reap nor sow, but God feeds them; consider the lilies of the field; they neither toil nor spin, yet God clothes them.

Then today Jesus Christ tells us the most shocking news of all. Sell all your possessions and give alms. How many of you are lining up to do that? Does Jesus really expect us to do that?

Well, maybe. But I suspect probably not. I don't think he's being literal here. I think his point is entirely different. I think what he's after is to get us to think about the list. To me the critical verses, not just for today, but this entire chapter, are verses 33 and 34. We learn two things.

I'm going to start with this last thing we learn first. Where your treasure is, there your heart is also. I want to invite you to pick one of the stained-glass windows on the wall and focus on it for a moment. Particularly those of you who have been attending this church for a long time, I want you to think for a moment. What memories does that window conjure up for you? Do you associate that window with a particular person? Do you associate it with a particular event? If there's a memorial plaque at the base of it, do you associate it with the person whose name is on that plaque?

Here's a question. How many of you could tell me what story that particular window depicts? How many of you could tell that story to another person? That was the original for all

artwork in the church, including stained-glass windows. In an era, when few people could read, artwork was a primary teaching tool to pass on the faith.

If I were to ask you, no doubt some of you would say your faith is the most important thing to you. My question is, how much treasure are you devoting to it? I'm not just discussing your monetary treasures. I'm also discussing your temporal treasures. If your faith is really important to you, then how much time do you spend on it? How much effort do you really put into it? Do you study it? Do spend time nurturing it? Do you really try to live it? How much "treasure" are you really giving to it?

The obvious corollary to that is, where is your treasure going? How much of our treasure is truly devoted to doing God's work? The first church I served was the Bethesda Presbyterian Church in Statesville, North Carolina. Bethesda had a historic sanctuary, which I thought was beautiful. Next door to it was a small building with a padlocked door. I thought that building was a garden shed, but I never really asked about it. Then I discovered it was the Session house. It was a small building with benches in it where the Session had met in the early days of the church. By the time I served there the Session house was a relic- preserved for historical reasons- opened precisely once/ year at homecoming.

One night at a Session meeting we received a report from the building and grounds committee. The Session house needed some repairs. They were going to cost \$1,300. The repairs were approved with no debate. A little while later we were debating whether or not we should increase our giving to presbytery by \$300. One person was dead set against it. "It's nice to help others if we get a little extra money, but we have to take care of ourselves first."

I didn't say anything, but I found myself getting angry. Jesus Christ didn't found the church so that people could preserve their history. How is it that we can justify spending \$1,300.00 on a building that sits there 364 days a year but find it hard to part with \$300 to help others. Would it really please Jesus for us to make that choice? How can we truly say we are his servants if we replace his values with ours? Our treasure ought to be the things he treasures.

Again, it isn't just money. It's our material goods, our time, our values that so often out of alignment with his. On one occasion I received the complaint that I started church too late. The person was concerned that they might miss their tee time at the golf course.

But Jesus goes even further. Jesus encourages to make ourselves a treasure. The gospel often is translated as an unfailing treasure, but I found another adjective for that translation that I like even better. It's possible to read that passage as saying, "Make of yourselves an inexhaustible treasure." Make yourselves into a treasure.

Making ourselves into a treasure is the highest form of faith. Let me tell you what I think that means. Making ourselves into a treasure is more than just a commitment to attend church regularly. It's more than a commitment to following a moral code. It involves replacing those things that matter most to us with those things that matter most Jesus. Don't just cross

out a few things on that paper. Crumple up that paper and toss it out. Pick the paper that Jesus gave you and make his list, your list. Do you know what's number one on his list? You.