

## *Giving and Growing in Faith*

Rev. Nancy Willet  
Matthew 6: 19-21

Stewardship Series #2

FPC Uvalde  
Nov. 8, 2009

STUFF. We all love stuff, don't we? Humans just seem to have a proclivity to collect. I read that almost all cultures, except one—the African Pygmies collect things. The Pygmies' culture, though teaches them that everything they own, must be able to be carried on their backs. I'm afraid we all wouldn't make it as Pygmies, would we?

Different societies place greater worth on different things. Humans everywhere collect treasures and assign status to one another on the basis of what has been acquired. In one society, a person is judged by his livestock; in another it might be precious metals or stones. In our culture—a money based economy, the old greenback reigns supreme. Once we have achieved this status of having money, we can then display it in various ways—through our cars, our homes, jewelry, art, and these are only a few of our collectibles!

Our Gospel reading today from Matthew, however, greatly challenges this equation, though. I'm talking about the equation of a person's worth based on his or her acquisitions.

We know that treasured clothing, furs and silks are vulnerable to moths. A treasured book—one that may have been passed down to you through the generations, is vulnerable to the pages just flat disintegrating. We can take it even farther—livestock can get sick and die, precious stones may break, and we know we can lose our money in the stock market.

In other words, those who base their worth on the assets they own place themselves in a highly vulnerable position—just because we know that our assets will not last forever—then what happens to our worth, or sense of who we are?

I would like to focus on one little verse out of our reading today. Most of us probably know it by heart. If I were to start the verse, you would probably be able to complete it for me. We know it so well, I fear, that we might not really be paying attention to what Jesus was really saying. The verse I am speaking about is “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:21).

In this verse, Jesus not only challenges the equation of a person's worth in terms of his or her possessions, but he also challenges the connection between our personal devotion and our treasure-or our money.

We have to be very careful how we read this verse, because it is very easy to read the other way around, isn't it? 'Where your heart is, there your treasure will be also.' That would make sense, wouldn't it? We spend our money on things all the time that are dear to our hearts. We listen to our hearts and are led by our hearts. We give to what matters to us.

But that is not what Jesus said!

I get appeals all the time from Perkins School of Theology, where I went to seminary. They start off their appeal by saying they know how much I care about my seminary and what they are doing. Send us money to improve this building or to add on to the chapel.

We get stuff in the mail all the time, don't we? If you are a nature person, we get appeals from the Nature Conservancy, from Greenpeace, from Heifer International, from World Vision, and the list goes on and on. Where your heart is, what you care about is what you give to, right?

But that's not what Jesus said!

You've probably heard this quote before from G.K. Chesterton that says, "Show me a person's checkbook and I'll show you what he really believes."

How much money do you spend on entertainment, on family, on clothes, on travel, on the church? Where we spend our money does say a lot about us. It says a lot about our values. "Where your heart is, there your treasure will be also.

But that's not what Jesus said!

Jesus said, ***where you put your treasure is where your heart will end up.*** To be sure, how we spend out money does say a lot about us, but Jesus seems to be saying that how we spend our money will determine what sort of person we will become. Instead of "give from the heart," which we hear so many times, Jesus saying "give where you want your heart to be, and then let your heart catch up."

Put your treasure where you want your heart to be.

If you want to be an art collector, buy art. If you care about your landscaping at your house, hire a competent gardener. And if you want to grow your faith, bring an offering to God.

Wherever your treasure is, there your heart will follow.

We more often act our way into a new way of thinking than think our way into a new way of acting. We more often act our way into a new way of thinking than think our way into a new way of acting.

That means that we *do* have some control over what happens to our hearts. We can do certain things to make our hearts feel something. Our devotion—our treasure—whether to stuff or to God *can* be directed.

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

I know that growing in faith is important here at FPC. I believe that is why we have so many faithful people that attend Sunday school, Women's Bible Study, Book Club, and Choir practices. We have many faithful folks who minister at the nursing home each Sunday. We attend these programs in the church and serve in these ways to deepen our understanding of God, to serve God, and to learn new ways to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. We want to grow our faith.

Serving, worshipping, and learning, all these things grow our faith, but we should be sure to include another Christian practice in that list: giving. Giving generously is a way to grow your faith. In other words:

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Put another way, one might say:

Don't give on the faith you have, but on the faith  
you wish you had.

Give to God's work and your relationship with God  
will deepen.

Give to God, not only because you believe,  
but in order to believe more fully.

Give faithfully and you will grow in your faith.

So you may be asking yourself at this point just how this is going to work, when you give everything you think you can possibly give to God. Well folks, there is a learning curve here, and some learning for us *all* to do.

STUFF. We may need to learn that we may not really need all the stuff we have.

We need to learn—and believe—that God is faithful and can and will take care of us—out of the abundance of God, not just because we feel needy, but because God is a generous, lavishly giving God. Everything God created is good—the creation story in Genesis tells us that. Jesus turned the water into wine when there was a need; he feed over 5000 people from five loaves and two fish when there was a need. When the disciples were not catching any fish, Jesus told them to drop their nets on the other side of the boat and their nets were so full of fish they had a hard time getting them all into their boat! Our God is not only an awesome God; our God is a generous God.

That is the biblical narrative—a narrative of abundance. We, however, in this day and age do not live out of a narrative of abundance. Our story is a different story all together. We have a scarcity mentality today that says there is never enough, never enough. We live in the most prosperous nation in the history of the world, yet we have a hard time celebrating the abundance of God. A scarcity mentality says that enough is always something more than what you have.

However, if we believe in God's Word—our abundant God will NOT let us starve when we place our treasure—our devotion in God and not in stuff.

God doesn't want our money because our money shouldn't mean much to us. God wants our money because **God knows** it means a great deal to us. And any offering of money is an offering of ourselves.

Walt Whitman once said, "When I give, I give myself." So God wants our money because God wants us.

You won't read about Jesus saying anywhere that "it's only money." Instead Jesus says,

Where your treasure goes, there your heart will follow.

God wants our treasure because God wants our hearts, our whole hearts. God asks us to give our whole hearts because, with such people, God can do anything. God can do anything with those who express the kind of trust and even abandon that are characteristic of both generosity and faith. God wants our treasure because God wants our hearts. God wants us. Amen.

Excerpts of this sermon taken from "Giving and Growing" by Martin B. Copenhaver