

Treasures of the Heart

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October 20, 2019 - Pledge Sunday



Matthew 6:19-21

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

The word of God for the people of God, thanks be to God.

In our culture money talks but talking about money is hard. The holidays are quickly approaching, and we know if we want to have a pleasant experience around the table with our parents, in-laws, children, and siblings there are a few topics to avoid—religion, politics, and money.

I love talking about money, and as a CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™ professional that is a good thing. This past week at the Financial Planner Association annual meeting, I heard that 67% of women would rather talk about their own death than talk about money. No corresponding number was given for men. Frequently, we give money too much power when in reality money is just a tool that can add to the quality of life. One can have very modest means and live a rich life of love, good health, family, community, and purpose. And one can have no money worries at all and be totally miserable, void of community, purpose, and love. When we give money too much power we get stressed about it. Medical News Today wrote in November 2017 that stress about money can increase our risk of a heart attack by 13 fold.

It won't come as a surprise that Stewardship or Pledge Sunday is one of my favorite Sundays. For me there is Easter, Christmas and then Stewardship or Pledge Sunday. I am honored to preach on this occasion, because for me this is a day of Thanksgiving. For on this day we give thanks for all our gifts, but particularly for how we have been blessed financially. We express our gratitude by pledging how we will use our financial gifts in the coming year.

Our text for this morning is one that is frequently used when talking about faith and money. And, Jesus actually had a lot to say about money. He commended the woman who put her last coin into the synagogue's treasury. She gave sacrificially where others gave a token offering out of their abundance. He chastised religious leaders who allowed sacred space to be turned into a marketplace where the poor

were taken advantage of when they couldn't afford to purchase required elements for worship and sacrifice. Jesus reprimanded those who wanted their debts forgiven but refused to forgive the debts of others. And here in our text this morning, Jesus said where your treasure lies, that's where your heart can be found.

Money and finance are heart issues. If you are wondering what is really important to you, just ask yourself where do you spend your money? Read your bank statements and credit card statements. You might be surprised to find out what is really important to you—and equally surprised to find out what is not as important as you **say** it is since no money is going toward that concern.

Yet as we think about our priorities and how we use our financial gifts, it is important to remember that each of us has a money story. We learned about money growing up. Some of us learned there was never enough money. Others learned money was a tool to bribe us to do what we didn't want to do. Some learned, if we did our chores or got good grades, we would be rewarded with money. Others experienced money as a weapon for control. Or, perhaps you witnessed money as the source of many family arguments. And, most of us learned the tooth fairy brought us money for teeth that naturally fell out.

So when it comes to managing money and giving money, we have history, and perhaps some baggage, but undoubtedly we all have stories. At times we have to overcome our history and our fears about money in order to live into our ministry and purpose.

The scripture from Matthew starts off sweetly:

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal: That sounds like a wise proverb. In other words don't give things more power than they deserve. For if someone steals them, then our hearts will be broken.

How many of us have had our home or car broken into? My home has been broken into four times and I don't even live in a bad neighborhood. My first emotion was fear quickly followed by extreme anger. Then I hoped nothing too valuable had been taken. Lastly, I was annoyed that I had to pay good money to repair the damage and try to secure my home better. While my anger and annoyance were real, I was and am grateful no one was hurt and of course things can be replaced.

But if we continue with our text, it get serious:

But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Well, the text moved from being a sweet proverb to a declaration about our spiritual health. Our hearts and souls are the essence of who we are. Our souls long to be at one with the Divine. Our hearts want an eternal connection that can never be destroyed, or hacked, or stolen. Jesus spoke these words in the gospel of Matthew in a section called the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount is a collection of instructions on discipleship. If we are serious about following the way of Jesus, then it makes a difference where we put our treasure. For where we put our treasure impacts our destiny. That is serious.

So as we conclude our Stewardship season on this Pledge Sunday, we are given the opportunity to think about what is really important to us. Stewardship and purpose are connected. Stewardship and giving are connected. I know I am using this big church word of stewardship without defining it. For me, stewardship is responsibly using what we have. So the question for today is, how will we use the gifts God has blessed us with in the coming year? How will we use our gifts—financial, spiritual, and physical gifts so that the light of God’s love will shine through our giving and bless the world?

We talk about giving not to guilt anyone. Guilt produces anger. If we are managing what God has given us, then we need not be angry or feel guilty.

Sometimes churches get hung up on what percentage a person should give back to God. Well, here is a news flash, it all belongs to God. 100% of what we have and who we are is because of God’s grace and mercy. Many churches encourage people to give a financial tithe which is 10% of their earnings. As one who believes in tithing, I am usually asked whether one is to give 10% of one’s net or gross income and my response is yes! I am not about to get that granular about one’s financial giving. Jesus chastised people who got hung up on the letter of the law and forgot the spirit of the law. The spirit of the law is to give substantially to God first with thanksgiving.

Today, we offer you an opportunity to live into grace, and love and to support the ministry of this incredible church. Seattle First Baptist Church has given witness to the love of God for 150 years. Generations before us believed in the power of God to transform lives, while bring healing to individuals and the

planet. Generations before us surround the vulnerable in love, and took risks to be the hands, feet, and heart of God. We can do the same for others in our community today and for generations to come.

Four years ago, pastor Ned Allyn Parker was doing the children's message on pledge Sunday. He created a three foot replica of the offering plate, set it on the floor, and used it as an illustration for the children. As he was talking about the importance of giving and what pledging is about, one of our precious baby girls, probably just three years old went and stood in the middle of the three foot offering plate on the floor. In that moment, the true meaning of stewardship was made crystal clear.

The best gift we can give to God, is our whole selves. As imperfect as we are, we can give our lives to God to be used as instruments of grace, mercy, and love. Even though we may be in need ourselves, we can give what we have that God will use us to bless others. Even though we make mistakes, O God we offer ourselves to you. And at times we are afraid, but God we offer you our hearts and our treasure. As little as it might be, God we offer it all back to you.

This may not be the season where you can pledge a lot—or even anything financial. Perhaps this is your season where you pledge your time and your talents. We welcome those pledges today as well. We want you to come forward in faith, believing that your situation and financial circumstance will turn around. And when they do, you will give richly as God has blessed you. So whether our gifts are big or small we are invited to come forward bringing our offering for this week, and our pledges for 2020. God will receive us and our gifts of gratitude and thanksgiving.

Take O take me as I am God;
Summon out what I shall be;
Set Your seal upon my heart and live O God, in me.

Ben has instructions for us as we come with our offerings and pledges.