

Isaiah 1: 1, 10 – 20
Hebrews 11: 1-3, 8-16
Luke 12: 32 – 40
12 Pentecost, Proper 14

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“Where is Our Treasure?”

Jesus said, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Our treasures and our hearts are somehow intertwined and inseparable. So, where is our treasure? Where are our collective treasures and where are our individual treasures? Is it ever in our possessions? Is it in our relationships? The kingdom of God is already ours – it has been given to us as has God’s love and forgiveness. All we have to do is say yes to God’s love. And yet we fret and worry and plan and scheme to accumulate things – things that burden us, trap us, and deteriorate even as we gather them in. Where is our treasure?”

As I complete nine years as the sixth rector of Saint Barnabas, and my entire fourteen year clergy career, and a work life spanning almost fifty years, that question – where has my treasure been, and where is it now looms ever larger in my heart and mind.

All my work, I am happy to say, has been intellectually interesting, socially useful, morally defensible, and spiritually enriching. The pay in dollars has been less than stellar – by some accounting – I once claimed that I ended up in ministry because I finally found a career that paid less than school teaching and had a more uncertain future – so, of course, I was drawn to it like a moth to the candle. But the compensation in those precious moments of being with wonderful people in all the power moments of life has been beyond all expectation. I am rich indeed.

Our lessons this morning give us all some sense of how we might discern where our treasure is. We should begin with our relationship with God. What God desires is for us to change our ways, to act differently towards ourselves and our neighbors. The sacrifice that brings union with God is rooted in the actions of our lives; we are the offering ourselves, not what we purchase for God. I often have asked people when they were happiest and they seldom pick a time when they had lots of money or possessions. People report that they were happiest when they had dreams to realize, hopes for the future, and opportunities to offer their gifts to the world. And note that God asks us to “remove the evil of our doings from before my eyes.” God further invites us “to argue it out.” This suggests strongly that God desires us to come before God when we are filled with sin, with worry, with fear, with uncertainty and then talk to and with God about the way forward. And, we should remind ourselves that the truth is that open, honest communications begins with God but extends to our spouses, family, and friends.

It is in the Letter to the Hebrews that we see the clearest connection between ourselves, our membership in the Body of Christ, this thing we call church, and our treasures. If faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen, so, too, is church. In our baptismal covenant and in our on-going membership in a community of faith like Saint Barnabas, we pledge our lives to other human beings, not knowing what

will come after. We launch ourselves into the unknown, believing that the things we hope for will come to pass. Like Abraham, we set out for a place not knowing fully where that place really is or how to get there easily and quickly. We move away sometimes from all that we have known to reside as strangers in a strange land, this place we call church. For some of us, perhaps intentionally or not, we bring new life into the church and then have to figure out how to be connected to people who are not our biological family, who may think differently than we, and whom we did not really choose as members of the church. And like our ancestors who followed God's call to lead a new life, all who join a church seek a better country – one based on mutual love and devotion, one rooted in a belief that we can overcome our selfish desires and grow stronger and better when we seek to love and serve God and our fellow parishioners. And like Abraham, we do not always arrive at that better country – sometimes churches fall into conflict and disagreement. But every church teaches the conviction that the journey will lead to the right outcome for its members. It will not be easy or direct; there will be delays and detours along the way. But if we avoid despair and hold to our faith and to the love that brought us to the moment of pledge and promise, we can come to that better country.

Our Gospel reading completes an earlier message about possessions, human greed, and human treasure and then presents a parable rooted in the reality that life is what happens to us when we are busy making plans.

In the parable, Jesus calls up the image of the people of Israel on the night of the first Passover, belts fastened, ready to go, ready to leave their homes, their possessions, and flee to liberty from slavery. Just as last week, the rich man, who claimed that all he owned was really his – my crops, my barn, my wealth, so, too, we must remember that all our possessions are on loan; all our things, all the material parts of our lives will be left behind. I have never seen a hearse with a trailer hitch because we really can't take it with us. Moreover, this imagery of being ready is not just about being prepared to step away from the things of our lives; it is also about being spiritually ready. Our lives often do change instantly. Though we might think so when we are young, we never have "all the time in the world." Indeed, we have no time other than this present moment. Often do we regret words not spoken when we are faced with the truth that we can no longer speak to a loved one or to a friend. Like the owner of the house, we cannot know when difficulties will strike, when trouble will break into our carefully planned lives.

So, how then do we live at all? We all live by faith – the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen - even atheists do this. But, as Christians, we believe our world was prepared by the word of God and we are assured, even in the depths of our trouble or despair that God is with us and God shares our pains along with our joys. We might abandon God but God will not abandon us. We may not receive all the promises contained in our gifts and our desires, we may not even receive any promises save one – God's eternal and perfect love. God calls us to union with him as a bridegroom calls a bride. God begs us to be not afraid. We are invited, begged, to join our gifts and our hearts in union with God. Where is our treasure? One is right here at God's altar; among

our community of faith, exemplified in the bread and wine that we share which symbolizes God's wedding feast – open to all of us, not merely as treasured guests but truly as God's beloved ones. My truest treasure these past nine years has been right here among the people of Saint Barnabas. The return on my investment of my time and energy has been glorious – I am richer than I ever thought possible. It is the faith of the people of Saint Barnabas that has sustained me in times of doubt and fear, lifted me up again and again to see the wonders that God's love can do for this world when even one person says "I will with God's help."

The glory of God is humankind fully alive, Irenaeus tells us. Where is our treasure? It is in being fully alive in God and with God. Amen.