

A well-known evangelist was once invited by a wealthy man to come down and preach in a country church in order to help them raise funds to pay a debt. The man told the evangelist that he was free to stay his country house, his town house, or his seaside home. The evangelist wrote back and declined the invitation and said, ‘Sell one of your homes and pay the debt yourself’. That captures the spirit of what Jesus is talking about in our gospel lesson as well as our annual request to faithfully fund our local church budget.

In Matthew 6:19-21, which is part of the Sermon on the Mount, we hear Jesus offer advice concerning our treasures here on earth.

“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.

In the telling of the story, Jesus uses imagery familiar to those listening to him some 2,000 years ago. He tells his audience to avoid things that a moth can destroy, referring to the elaborate clothing which separated the rich from the poor. Does the intent of these words speak to us as well?

What can rust destroy? The word translated as rust is *brosis*. It literally means “eating away.” In New Testament times much wealth was determined by the amount of grain in one’s barns. The grain was easily polluted by worms, rats and mice that made their way into the barn, destroying the crop by “eating away” at them. The grain harvested this fall in the Midwest area is much more secure, by and large. Yet, the words of Jesus invite us to think about the transitory value of our various possessions.

Jesus tells his audience to avoid treasures which thieves steal and this was well before cyber security threats. Jesus is trying to have us place our material possessions in the larger perspective of the needs of humanity and our place in eternity. What are the true treasures of our hearts? Is the welfare of humanity and planet earth our treasure? Is an eternal relationship with God our treasure? Or are transitory possessions that will perish over time our treasures? Verse 21 seems to be the key sentence in this particular teaching point of the Sermon on the Mount. “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Ann Landers had an interesting letter in her newspaper column years ago about a man who never embraced this teaching from Jesus. It was from a girl who was writing about her uncle & aunt. She said, "My uncle was the tightest man I've ever known. All his life, every time he got paid he took \$50 out of his paycheck & put it under his mattress. Later in life he got sick and was about to die. As he was dying, he said to his wife, "I want you to promise me one thing." "Promise what?" she asked. "I want you to promise me that when I'm dead you'll take my money from under the mattress and put it in my casket so that I can take it all with me." The girl's letter went on with the story. "He died and his wife kept her promise. She got all that money from underneath the mattress, went to the bank, made a deposit, and then wrote out a check and put it in his casket."

As we think through the implications of Jesus' words we can place them within the larger context of scripture that indicates all things are in God's ownership and we are stewards of God's possessions for a time being.

-Genesis 1:1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

It all belongs to God and we have the privilege to manage it for a while.

-Psalm 8:3-9

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established;
What are human beings that you are mindful of them, Mortals that your care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God, And crowned them with glory and honor.

You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; You have put all things under their feet...O Lord, our Sovereign how majestic is your name in all the earth.

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Dr. Terry Tafoya shared a story at the annual convention of pastoral chaplains a number of years ago in Toronto, Canada. In a session entitled, "Children of the Rainbow: Ministering across Cultures," Dr. Tafoya shared pictures of his home in southwestern United States. He talked about how the people did not have electricity or running water, not because they could not afford it, but because they chose to live without these conveniences. Why would one choose that life? He replied, "If you go to the river each day for your water, you will never pollute the river and if you go to the forest each day to gather wood for cooking, you will never pollute the forest. It is what helps us to remember our connectedness. This is a valuable lesson to all of us who are managers of God's creation.

As we remember that God is our creator and ultimately has ownership of all creation that can help us to view "our possessions" in a proper perspective. As we understand that our ultimate treasure is our relationship with God then the use of the possessions at our disposal will come into greater clarity.

Finally, let's move over to the remarks from the Apostle Paul in his letter of I Timothy 6:17-19 as we consider our treasures.

As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

Paul offers us insights into the world of the wealthy. Riches must not make one proud, or make one think of oneself as better than a neighbor with less accumulated wealth. Paul warns about setting one's heart on riches. Those with wealth are encouraged to share it for the good of humanity as this reveals where our heart is and ultimately what we treasure. Wealth in and of itself is not a sin but it is a great responsibility to use whatever wealth we have in a manner that furthers God's kingdom here on earth.

I share these biblical insights today within the context our stewardship campaign this month for the support of the 2019 church budget. Many of you received the letter about our mission and ministry and a request to respond by filling out and turning in your estimate of giving card. If you did not receive this mailing and would like the information there are additional copies in the back on the small table.

Your financial support of the mission and ministry of St. Paul UMC is one way to place your treasure in heaven, that is, prioritize your relationship with God in a concrete manner. Please reflect on your estimate of giving for 2019 and return your card by mail, in the offering plate or drop it off at the church office by November 18th which is our Consecration Sunday.

Finally, there was one man who not only thought of eternal rewards as he gave to his church but he knew the safety it brought him in the present day. Two men were marooned on an island. One man paced back and forth worried and scared while the other man sat back and was sunning himself. The first man said to the second man, "aren't you afraid we are about to die." "No," said the second man, "I make \$100,000 a month and give 10% faithfully to my church each and every month. My Pastor will find me."