

Give Where Your Treasure Is

March 29, 2020

Text: Matthew 6:19-21; Luke 6:38

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. (Matthew 6:19-21, NRSV)

Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back. (Luke 6:38, NRSV)

We continue our sermon series on Adam Hamilton's Book *The Way: Five Essential Practices of the Christian Faith*. We've talked about worship and prayer, reading scripture, and serving others. Today we turn our attention to giving.

Now we can easily understand that worship, prayer, reading scripture, and service are spiritual disciplines we should practice, but giving? How is giving a spiritual practice?

It's important for us to look at the connection between money and the spiritual life. Jesus talked more about money than he did prayer, scripture, and service *combined*. Jesus understood the human tendency to equate security and happiness with wealth and what it could provide. Jesus makes clear that our relationship with money can either sabotage our relationship with God or deepen it.

Jesus tells us in Luke 6 that, "One's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. We live in a world that tell us just the opposite is true. We are bombarded with messages that tell us that if we had bigger, better, newer, cooler stuff, we'd be happier and more fulfilled. But is that really true?"

During this time of social distancing, I've been taking an online course from Yale called "The Science of Happiness." The course begins with debunking the myths we have about what makes us truly happy. Scientific evidence is presented

that shows that what we *think* will make us happy actually doesn't. Everything from making more money to having the latest and greatest gadgets to plastic surgery is examined in light of scientific research. Each and every time, we see that these things do not increase our happiness. In fact, some actually make us less happiness. So what *does* bring happiness?

First, let's talk about the difference between happiness and joy. Jesus never promises us happy. He never says, "If you follow me, you will be happy." When the angels announced Jesus' birth to the shepherds, he did not say, "I bring you tidings of great happiness." Happy is a reaction to something external. Happy comes when we get a promotion or eat a good meal or hear someone sharing good news. Unhappy works the same way. We are unhappy if we don't get that promotion or the dinner is burnt to a crisp or when someone gives us bad news. We react to something external, something out there. But joy is different. Joy is in your soul, in your bones. Joy cannot be taken away from you. It isn't affected by outward circumstances, about what is happening out there. Joy is in your heart and it comes from loving God, being loved by God, and being redeemed by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is joy. And no one can take that away from you.

One affect of living with joy is gratitude. Rather than focusing on what will make us happy if we could only attain it, we offer gratitude for what we already have. We look around and feel grateful for having a roof over our heads, food in the fridge, people who love us, and how much we are loved. Sometimes it's hard to feel gratitude due to our current circumstances. I think now is one of those times. We are experiencing major disruptions in our lives. We are isolated at home. We can't gather with family and friends. It's easy to fall into depression about what we don't have but what if we focused on what we do have? We are safe. We are given the gift of slowing down. We find creative ways to stay connected. And we know that this too will pass because we hold onto our faith.

Gratitude is key to living the good life. That is what giving to the church is all about. It is about giving what we can with joy in gratitude for all God has given us. Giving reflects the very nature of God. Growing in the grace of giving is part of the Christian journey of faith, a response Christian disciples offer to God's call to make a difference in the world.

People who give generously to the church do so because they genuinely desire to make a positive difference for the purposes of Christ and because they want to align their lives with higher purposes. They give in response to the Spirit's urging. They give because they love God, love the church, and desire to grow in love of neighbor.

Our church is in difficult circumstances. We know from experience that people give more to the church when we gather in worship than we do when worship is cancelled for some reason. I've reminded everyone in my "Daily Connection" email that we can still give to the church online, through our banks, or by putting a check in the mail. Thank you to all who have continued to give during this time of crisis and encourage all of us to continue to give until we can gather again in worship.

It may not come as a surprise that giving is a lot like service. As we talked about last week, when we give of our time and talent in the service of others, it has a positive effect on us. The same is true of giving. When we give our tithes and offerings to the church or donate to a cause we believe in, we are blessed in the giving.

Gratitude leads to giving. But gratitude is something we have to cultivate. Like other spiritual practices, it is something we have to do on a consistent basis until it becomes a regular part of our lives. We've been talking about growing in fives: pray five times a day, read five passages of scripture a day, practice five acts of kindness each week. Today we're encouraged to give five times each month. Whether it is giving to the church, giving a higher than normal tip to a server, or donating to a charity or cause you believe in, give five times in the coming month. Take note of how it makes you feel. I think you'll find that the act of giving puts a song in your heart. The more we give, the happier we become.

These are challenging times to be sure. But even in the midst of social distancing we still need to focus on the love of God and the love of our neighbors. Giving brings us closer to God because it makes us more like the person God created us to be. So be grateful for what you have and give as a way of thanking God for the many blessings in your life.

Amen.