

Matthew 13: 44

⁴⁴ “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Trinity Presbyterian Church
October 29, 2017

“Lessons in Green: It Ain’t Easy”

It was a Sunday morning during worship. The offering plate was being passed around the pews. The usher came up to a young girl who said, “Mr. Usher, could you lower the plate for me?” Thinking she wanted to be able to put something into the plate, he lowered it to the child’s level. “No” said the child, “a little lower please.” Mr. Usher lowered it a bit more. “More” said the child. Mr. Usher was confused, “But if I put the plate any lower it will be on the ground.” “Yes,” said the child, “put it on the floor!” Mr. Usher placed the plate on the ground to which the child stepped into it, stood there a moment and said, “There, now this is what I want to give to God.”

During Stewardship we are reminded of our calling. We are reminded that all we have and are belongs to God. When God wondered who would be the people to display God’s love and justice in action, God called you. When the Giver of all things dreamed about who might help make our chaotic world a more generous, kind and welcoming place, God called you and me. And God didn’t just call us, but has equipped all of us with [gifts] that [God] trusts us to [use] to help transform [the world]. So how we are using our [gifts] to help transform [the world] is perhaps the best measure for how we are both living out our faith as well as into our faith. Last week Rev. Kellie Browne preached a no-holds-barred sermon about our attachment to money. We all had a come to Jesus moment. She gave us a ten-dollar bill, told us to match it with our own ten-dollar bill and then asked us to give it away to some random stranger. It was a kick in the glutes to get us to become more aware about how we are using our [gifts], because what we choose to do with our [gifts] might be the clearest indicator for how we are living out our faith one ten-dollar bill at a time. During stewardship we are reminded: All our [gifts] belong to [God] and how we [use] them matters.

Of course, there is this another side to the reality of our lives. It ain’t easy. It. Ain’t. Easy. I’ll say it one more time for the Holy Spirit: it ain’t easy.

Yes, we all have been given [gifts] that [God] expects us to [use] to help transform [the world], but the truth is when it comes to transforming [the world], it ain’t easy! Sure, God has given us [gifts] and expects us to [use] them in a way that is [connected], but even to organize them in a meaningful, efficient way, it ain’t easy. It would be wonderful if we had another ten hours in

the week so we could give our time to a cause, but given our 24/7 world, it ain't easy. Wouldn't it be wonderful if at the end of the month, after doing our bills, we all had a little cushion we could give away freely, but the truth is there is always a little worry in the back of our minds and it ain't easy. Mercy, for some of us to get out of bed on a Sunday morning to come to church, it ain't easy. Then we come to church only to hear the preacher talk about money and it ain't easy. Life ain't easy, relationships ain't easy, the world ain't easy. Perhaps it is why we hear Jesus saying, "The way to life—to kingdom living—is a narrow and difficult path; but the way to destruction...well, that's a six-lane highway. Translation: it ain't easy. To be generous in a greedy world, ain't easy. To be a disciple of Jesus who has [gifts] that God expects us to [use] to help transform [the world], it ain't easy.

So, Jesus tells another parable: The kingdom of God is like a treasure, says Jesus, hidden in a field. It was a common practice for landowners to bury their money bags somewhere in a field to keep their treasures safe. It was a time before Wells Fargo or First Community bank. The treasure is hidden until someone happens to stumble upon it and his response is joy. In his moment of joy what does he decide to rebury the treasure somewhere else in the same field. Now why would he rebury the treasure? Answer: because he wants to keep it for himself. Crafty, isn't he? So, he sells everything he has so he can purchase the field where the treasure is. It is here that a Jewish audience would be rolling on the floor laughing. You see, there was a common Jewish law which stated that any treasure found in a field, even if purchased by another party, automatically goes back to the field's original owner. The man who found the treasure can't use it, because he could either be subject to the reparations of breaking the law; or he could come clean and give the treasure back to the original landowner, in which case all he is left with is an empty field. Either way he spent all his resources trying to possess a treasure he can never use, because it doesn't really belong to him! The kingdom of God is like a treasure which when we stumble upon it, brings us great joy. But it cannot be used if we are procuring the treasure for ourselves. The treasure always goes back to the original owner?

Well, if we are going to continue living out our stewardship calling, we are going to need to adopt some longer-term behaviors. We need to form some new rituals as a community around our understanding of our treasure. Our rituals are vital markers of our identity. We worship, pray, forgive and practice receiving forgiveness—all vital signs of who we are. These days, we talk about stewardship for three weeks and that often feels like too much! But it is going to take more than filling out one pledge card once a year or having a one-time challenge of giving money away to strangers before the new behaviors are going to set in. So maybe when the offering plate comes around, we hold its weight in our hands—even if we don't have anything to put in it. But we say, "I offer you my life, O God." Or we keep ten bucks aside every week to randomly give away—that's \$520 per year. Whatever we decide to do, we need to graft a ritual

into our lives so our understanding about our money is transformed. Because if we don't it will be all-too-easy for the world to form us in its worrisome way of thinking.

So what are a couple of stories from when you gave the twenty dollars away this past week? Who did you give the money away to and how did it feel? [In between stories Jon says, "*The kingdom of God is like a treasure shared with _____ and it brings everyone great joy!*"]

The kingdom of God is like a treasure we stub our toes on, and in our joy of finding it we share it with everyone. Truly, what good is our treasure if it can't be used?