

A Holy Investment

Luke 12: 32-34

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Last night we just back from a family vacation in Cancun, Mexico. Among the Mayan ruins and cenotes is resort living. A week of eating and drinking too much; of beach time and smelling like suntan lotion. It was a treat. And then there are the workers who for ten dollars a day would go out of their way to accommodate our privileged splurging. Whenever we would thank them for their kindness, they would always say the same thing: "It is my good pleasure." After a barista whipped up an a.m. latte: "It is my good pleasure." After saying “gracias” for a hand-delivered margarita at the pool: "It is my good pleasure." It was their pleasure to offer us what we asked for. Jesus claims God responds the same way when offering us the kingdom. Do not worry about deserving it, says Jesus, for it is God’s good pleasure to give it to you as a gift.

Except, notice God’s gift comes with a word of caution. God yearns to give us kingdom life, but there are things that can distort our way of living into it. Our habits of acquiring stuff. Our need for financial security. Money has a reputation, Jesus says, of distorting kingdom values. Jesus gives us a barometer for how we are doing when he tells us to follow the money trail and it will expose our hearts. Around this time of month we start getting credit card statements. If I were to circle all the things on there that I didn’t really need I wonder how much ink would be on the page? If we follow the money and see we notice we spend it primarily on ourselves, doesn’t it reveal who we believe really matters? It’s sobering. Or peek at the national security budget. Notice the pentagon gets a 650-billion-dollar slice of the pie. What does it say about our heart as a nation? Last week, we sat in a pit of grief after 31 people were killed in a 13-hour period because of another episode of domestic terror—there have been 255 mass shootings this year. Yet, some legislators keep sending placebo “thoughts and prayers” as a response. They say the solution isn’t common sense gun laws, but to get Christian prayer back into the schools. But Jesus says follow the money trail and it will expose the truth about the heart of the matter. It is God’s good pleasure to offer us the kingdom, but money can influence our actions or inactions. It can distort our way of seeing God’s vision and living into it.

So Jesus coaches us like a broker not to invest in things that won’t last, but instead to “store up our treasures in heaven.” It’s an odd phrase. Now I used to think that if I gave someone ten dollars I would be depositing ten dollars in First Heavenly Bank and Trust—with interest, of course. And if I gave everything away on earth, I’d be a billionaire in heaven someday—like a 401k plan for after I’m dead. But it is not what Jesus is saying. Storing up treasures in heaven is an invitation to invest today in a future we are hoping for tomorrow. When Joy and I were in premarital counseling, just before the wedding our pastor handed us a pen and paper and asked us to create a budget. Having no idea what we were doing, we wrote down line items: Rent/Car

payment/Groceries/Student Loans/ Utilities/ Charities. We handed her our budget; she took one look at it and said, “Where is the line item for date money and weekend getaways? You know something to keep the relationship sizzling?” In the moment I was thinking: *but newlyweds don't need help keeping the relationship sizzling!* But the line item wasn't for the honeymoon phase. It was getting us to invest in a value for fifteen or fifty years down the road. “Store up treasure in heaven,” says Jesus. Practice investing now in view of the future we are hoping for.

Well, if it's true that money leads to the heart, what does it tell us about Trinity's heart? If we were to pull out our budget what would we see? In most churches our size the two main expenses are staff and building maintenance. Now, we might love our staff and appreciate our building, but what would we say is the heart of the church? The people! The stories we share. The ways we see God at work in each other's lives. The gifts that come together to create community and belonging.

Our mission statement says we are about building community—how are we investing ourselves in the value? You know, I've challenged the session this summer to get to know someone in the congregation better. It is a practice of investing in each other and our future. Perhaps something for us all to do.

Our mission statement says we are about intergenerational relationships—how are our committees investing for our future?

We are about justice and equity for people of color and the LGBTQ community—how does the budget reflect our investment?

Because here's the thing: if we follow what God is invested in it is us. We are God's heart. When it comes to God's budget every single one of us is a line item God is invested in. And so are the 650 undocumented immigrants who were rounded up and separated from their families in Mississippi last week. And so are the victims during another spate of mass shootings. And so are the trans children questioning their identity. So is the water we drink and the soil which produces our food. So is the air we breathe and the creatures that help balance our ecosystem. All of it is God's treasure. And when the almighty dollar manufactures injustice for those who God is invested in, Jesus is relentlessly resistant and imprudent, unapologetic and immovable. The question is: What about his church?

Where our treasure is, there we find our heart. Jesus is asking, “Where is our heart?” How are we investing today in the future we are hoping for tomorrow?