

Luke 12:32-40

“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.

“Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.

“But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

Sermon: High Grade Investment Opportunity – Act Now!

How are your investments doing these days?

Maybe this is just the kind of question you come to church to escape – especially this week. According to the CBOE Volatility Index, also known as the fear index, investors do not expect the financial highway to smooth out anytime soon, so fasten your seat belt, Bette Davis, it’s going to be a bumpy ride.

But, this sermon is not about the Volatility Index, the Dow Jones Index, or the S&P 500. This is an inquiry into just what kind of investment Jesus was recommending when he said:

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.

I have this interesting little book called Oneness – Great Principles Shared by All Religions. It was published almost a decade ago with an introduction by Mother Teresa – the same passage that I read this morning as the call to our offering. The teaching of Jesus about “where your treasure is, there you heart will be also,” is included in this book in a section called “Wisdom is more than riches.”

To put what Jesus said in the context of other religions several selections are offered.

From Islam: Riches are not from an abundance of worldly goods, but from a contented mind.

From Buddhism: The real treasure that is laid up by a man or woman through charity and piety, temperance and self control...The treasure thus hid is secure, and does not pass away.

And from Hinduism: Knowledge is the best treasure that a man can secretly hoard in life.

The editor of the book describes Wisdom as a combination of experience and awareness - inner strength, intuitive creativity, and mental power. Wisdom allows a person to evaluate experiences and avoid further mistakes. It allows a person to understand the present and glimpse the future. Wisdom dawns when a person experiences the connection of his or her individual awareness with God.

Wow! That sounds like a great investment. But can it be the whole story. It seems to me so much of life involves relationships and enjoyments which are not always wise but all too real.

Years ago a friend who was a professor of theology had his office robbed. In good professorial fashion he was a pipe smoker, and for some reason the theft of his pipes got under his skin and annoyed him in a way he found surprising and even disturbing. When we talked about it he quoted the passage in question:

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.

Frankly, I felt like he shouldn't beat himself up because he was upset – he was the victim, he had every right to be upset. I don't think God makes us the way we are and then judges us harshly us because we have attachments that mean something to us. It's only human.

And I have to think this is even more true of our close relationships. I could not help but think of the home invasion in Cheshire when I read the last section of the lesson: "But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into.

The Petit family is like so many we know in our church and community. The father, William, the lone survivor, is a physician and an active member of his community. He has put his who life into being a good husband, parent, citizen, - a healer and a person who contributes. Suddenly he is at the mercy of chaotic, evil impulses that no one can understand. And the more the we learn the worse the story gets.

What is that father supposed to feel in the aftermath of such a loss? Does God expect him to find detachment or contentment through some wisdom that we are all dust and to dust we shall return? How much of his life was invested in his wife and his two daughters? Yet the thieves broke in and stole from him more than I think most of us could ever bear to lose.

I can't imagine Jesus being critical of someone feeling sorrow and pain at the loss of a loved one. The Bible says that when Lazarus died, Jesus wept. Often it speaks of Jesus' compassion for others in their waywardness and suffering. Obviously he had deep feelings, attachments, and sympathies. The scripture does not suggest we be cold-hearted and simply rise above it all.

Yet sometimes we need a way to, if not rise above it all, at least to walk through it. In this regard I find the writing of Dr. Victor Frankl to be an authentic testimony with great wisdom to offer.

Frankl's most famous book begins an account of his experiences in the Nazi death camps, including Auschwitz. When Frankl went through those terrible gates at Auschwitz he set these goals for himself:

to survive

to use his medical skills and help where he could

to try and learn something

Frankl explained that what was needed to survive in those terrible circumstances was a fundamental change in a person's attitude towards life. Each had to learn that it did not really matter what they expected from life, but rather understand what life expected from them. Although he entitles his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, he writes:

We needed to stop asking about the meaning of life, and instead to think of ourselves as those who were being questioned by life – daily and hourly. Our answer must consist, not in talk and meditation, but in right action and right conduct. Life ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfill the tasks which it constantly sets for each individual. Therefore, the meaning of life differs from one person to another and from one moment to another. It is impossible to define the meaning of life in a general way.

If it is impossible to define the meaning of life in a general way, it is equally impossible to define what Jesus was speaking of in a general way when he said:

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.

I think much of the teaching of Jesus is corrective rather than comprehensive - he doesn't feel the need to tell us things we already know – he's directing us towards what we are missing, what we have left out. And so some of what he says is shocking, as if to pull the rug out from under our assumptions and get us out of our set ways and open our eyes to a new perspective.

Jesus urges those who hear him to avoid investing too heavily in the status quo – he wants them to be alert and watchful. God's righteous will is breaking into the world in a new and powerful way and this will bring fundamental change.

Jesus also says avoid investing too heavily in material possessions – “for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also,” and the proper focus of the heart is the things of God, not the things we can say we own.

And if there is a human weakness to overdo it on material possessions, we also tend to neglect the spiritual treasure God offers in calling us to be disciples of Christ.

In Frankl’s book he says we come to arrive at meaning in life through work, love, and suffering. Frankl knows that there is a lot in life that can break a person, but believes in the human freedom, the capacity in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."

Paul, two thousand years ago, also had that belief, but, but focused it on faith in Jesus Christ – a faith in which he had invested his whole life and all his hope for the future. Is this the investment opportunity we are all looking for? Let me end this sermon with a prospectus from Paul.

It is not ourselves we preach; we preach Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as other’s servant for Jesus’ sake. The God who first ordered light to shine in the darkness has flooded our hearts with his light. Yet we who has this spiritual treasure are like common clay pots, to show that the splendid power of it belongs to God, not to us. We are often troubled, but not crushed; sometimes in doubt, but never in despair; there are many enemies, but we are never without a friend; and though badly hurt at times, we are not destroyed. If everyday we experience something of the death of Jesus, that is so we may also know the power of his resurrection in our lives.

Act now – the time is right!