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“Where is Your Treasure?”

A sermon by Sam Miglarese

**19th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C)
August 11, 2019**

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16 & Luke 12:32-40

You probably heard the news report from last week’s mass shooting in El Paso about a very young child with multiple broken bones, apparently from the force of the child’s mother who used her body to shield her child from the bullets of the shooter. The mother was killed, but her child survived.

“Where your treasure lies, there your heart will be.”

We’ve all heard the challenging question, “What would you be willing to die for?” And in extreme circumstances like a mass shooting, or troops on a battle field, or first responders of all sorts who rush toward and into danger...we often have the most graphic answer to the question.

But, thanks be to God, for most of us, most of the time, the question about what we’d be willing to die for does not test us under such extreme circumstances. For most of us, most of the time, the challenge of the question needs to be rephrased: “What do you live for? Where is your heart, your treasure? And what does that look like day in, day out?”

In Chapter 12 of Luke’s Gospel, there is a collection of imperatives, wisdom sayings and short parables about masters and servants. When such a variety of Jesus’ teachings are collected together like this in one place, important phrases can easily get overlooked. But not today. This one jumps off the page and grabs our attention: “Wherever your treasure lies, there your heart will be.”

Jesus is making a statement of fact here, not scolding or admonishing his disciples. He's "telling it like it is," as we'd say today. "Wherever your treasure lies, there your heart will be."

The challenge comes when we ask ourselves where our treasure really is: where—if we look objectively and factually at the fabric of our everyday lives—where it is clear that our heart and our treasure truly lies. It's what we live for that matters most. In his teaching today Jesus is not posing the issue as a dramatic choice between great evil and great good. I'm pretty sure most of us are not often faced with a dramatic choice between great evil and great good. No, Jesus is talking about everyday priorities, about the countless choices we make among many, many good things, and, perhaps, occasionally something not very good.

Jesus is suggesting we need to look at how we rank the many values that compete for "first place" priority in our lives. Financial treasure is not bad; neither is worldly success, nor the approval of others, nor even social status. They are among the many good and worthy values that may well hold a place in our list of goals and aspirations. But what comes first? What is it that we treasure most in our lives, and how does that top priority show up in the commitments we make and the actions we take?

Stewardship Sunday is one of those occasions when churches ask their members to rank their priorities of time, talent, and treasure. And long-range planning is an occasion when churches rank the priorities of their community—an exercise such as our long-range planning team did recently when they came to the Session with a proposed Mission Statement and four priorities. Both of these are important times of discernment among many options that are good and worthy. Such occasions ask individuals and entire communities of faith to make a commitment to whatever they believe to be their highest priority, the greater good above others, the path that the Master wants his servants to take.

It seems to me that when we do these mundane exercises, we have an opportunity to respond to the invitation of Jesus to go deeper, to search our hearts for what we truly treasure most of all—what we live for every day that reflects ultimate values that would even be worth dying for if need be! In the Letter to the Hebrews we were reminded today of the example of Abraham and Sarah. Abraham's greatest treasure was his faith—confident assurance! It was in faith that Abraham left everything behind and went forth to find a land he had never seen. It was in faith that Sarah trusted in God's revelation that she, indeed, could and would conceive a

child in her old age. They both placed their trust in unseen treasures promised by God. And they valued God's promises more than anything else they possessed.

Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, a friend of this congregation, writes the following words in his new book *Revolution of Values: Reclaiming Public Faith for the Common Good*:

Half a century ago, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said we needed a "revolution of values" if we were to become the nation we have never yet been. King was able to name our moral crisis because he had learned the Bible's revolutionary vision of a whole new world among the poor and disposed. We must rediscover the revolutionary movement that has outlasted every worldly regime.

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This is our challenge too, as we consider the long shadow of gun violence, the flames of racial hatred, xenophobic rhetoric weaponized for political gain, immigrant children in cages, and the myriad other hot-button issues that are in play in our civic discourse and in our political choices. We must ask ourselves: What holds first place in our values? What are the things that matter most to us? How are we to shape our daily lives in a way that puts God's reign at the center and gives substance to, "the revolutionary vision" Jesus preached "of a whole new world among the poor and disposed"?

What are you willing to live for?

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