

Old Testament Lesson—1 Kings 3:3-14

Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David; only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places. The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the principal high place; Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you." And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?" It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor all your life; no other king shall compare with you. If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life."

New Testament Lesson—Matthew 6:19-21

"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."

Well, I've done my darndest, but I can't avoid talking about money forever, can I?

Alas, I suppose we have to get around to brass tax, eventually. So, here goes nothing!

Keen observers will know we've split this year's stewardship series into three parts: two Sundays on time, two on talents, and today begins our two Sundays on treasures.

But, the truth is we really shouldn't feel awkward talking about money, much less guilty or regretful. It's a part of our world, for better or worse. Jesus understood that.

And it's because he understood this that the topic comes up a lot in the gospels. Yes, Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God more than anything else. But...money and wealth are a close contender for second place. Yes, Christ was never shy about addressing our obligation to be good stewards of our resources—financial or otherwise.

The same could be said of the Apostle Paul who speaks often of how vital the generosity of his congregations is to his ministry around the world.

I'm not entirely sure why some of us are so hesitant to talk about money. I suspect it has something to do with the Church's history of financial abuses and corruption—the legacy of building grand cathedrals while the poor communities that surround those cathedrals go hungry.

Friends: We have to be honest about our past and, in many ways, our present. This is a legacy from which the Church must continue to repent.

I suspect some of our reluctance also comes from what might be the most misquoted verse in the entire Bible. I want you to mentally fill in the blank here, ok?

BLANK is the root of all evil. Well? What's the root of all evil?

I'll start with what's not correct. Money is *not* the root of all evil. What Jesus said was, "the *love* of money is the root of all evil."

I can't tell you how many times I've heard people tell me, "Money is the root of all evil." That's simply wrong. Jesus never argued for us to get rid of all forms of currency and exchange.

But he did want us to be wary of greed and corruption. This was nothing new, of course—going all the way back to the Ten Commandments, remember? "Thou shalt not covet."

He did want us to be wary of the temptation that we could somehow be completely self-sufficient—that we didn't need the gracious gifts of God—didn't need to rely on God—that we need only depend on ourselves.

Jesus wasn't worried about money, *per se*. But he was worried about us abusing the imperfect systems we've created. He understood the destructive power that follows when we hoard our resources—when we live and act through a lens of scarcity rather than a lens of abundance.

You see: Jesus is constantly challenging us to reconsider our value systems. Are the things we believe to be important in life really so valuable? Let me put it this way: Would you be embarrassed to show Christ a list of what you treasure the most?

Next Sunday, we'll have an opportunity to consecrate our whole selves to the Lord. Each of us gets an invitation to rededicate our lives in service to Christ—to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. We get to *become* the offering. We make it clear that our time, talents, and treasures belong to God—come from God—that we're blessed to be a blessing.

It's no coincidence that we do this during the month of Thanksgiving. I've been saying it for weeks: What we put in the plate—what we sign up for and volunteer to do—these offerings are an expression of our gratitude.

We're not just asking you to pledge a number—not just a percentage. We're asking you to pledge yourself—your hope—your love. We're asking you to respond to God's gifts with thanksgiving. Don't just say thanks—show it. *Show* your thanks.

Siblings in Christ: We're being called to reexamine what we value—to take inventory of what we treasure and why. Jesus puts it this way: Where is your heart? Where is your heart?

The best way to discover what's most important to us is to understand where our heart is: *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

And this wouldn't have been a new concept for Jewish people in the first century, either. The Bible speaks clearly and often about how God values the heart more than anything.

All the way back in Deuteronomy, for example, the author makes a striking point: Your circumcision—the sign of God's covenant marked on your body—is meaningless unless your heart is circumcised too. You see: It's our love that matters most to the Lord.

Yes, the true measure of any offering begins with the heart. It's why Jesus can point to a poor widow who gives a penny to the Temple treasury and say she's given more than anyone

else. It's why Paul can claim that, no matter how talented we are—no matter how much faith we might possess—if we don't have love, if we don't act out of love, it means nothing.

That being said, it's time to ask ourselves: Is your heart invested in the right stuff? Or are we wrapped up in earthly treasures that can be stolen—possessions that'll inevitably deteriorate? Are we consumed by consumerism? Where is your heart?

As Presbyterians, we've done our best to codify what's important to us in our Book of Confessions. It's a collection of faith statements, or *creeds*, written over the course of the Church's history.

There are twelve creeds in here—twelve statements of what we believe. Now that word, *creed*, is interesting. It comes from the Latin, “credo.” And do you know what “credo” literally means? It means, “to put one's heart.”

Belief then, it would seem, is literally a matter of the heart. Faith is a matter of the heart. This, then, is not just a collection of creeds, but a collection about where we're putting our hearts—about what we treasure as Presbyterians.

Isn't stewardship, then, ultimately a matter of the heart, too? I would argue that if it isn't—if we don't believe that to be true, then we're doing it wrong. If it isn't, then our priorities are not where they should be.

Friends, it's time for some real talk. If the Church is going to be relevant to an increasingly secular world, then we've got to reconsider where we're putting our heart. If Cedar Heights is going to be around for another hundred years, then we've got to reconsider what we treasure—what we value as a community of faith.

We can *say* certain issues are important to us, but if our resources don't reflect those convictions, then we're lying to ourselves! Will we *really* find our hearts with the poor and the marginalized? Will we find our hearts alongside God's justice and mercy?

Or will we find our hearts resting comfortably within the status quo? Are they hiding behind our privilege? Are they holding on for dear life to our massive 401K's—white-knuckling our generational wealth?

Well? Come on. Let's ask the hard questions.

Do we really believe in self-sacrificial giving? Do we really believe in the common good anymore? Or has it become more about what's good for me—for us? Have we become so focused on the short-term that we don't really care what happens in ten to twenty years?

Do we really want the wisdom of Solomon? Or would we *really* rather have deep, deep pockets along with all the bells and whistles—along with the defeat and downfall of our opponents?

Well? Be honest with yourself. Let's not fool ourselves into thinking this church will remain relevant and vibrant by being content with “doing what we've always done.”

Because that insidious complacency is a fast, slippery slope toward a harmful complicity with unjust systems. Because our silence on matters of life and death to so many is akin to violence to oppressed communities.

It's my prayer that we won't be silent—that we might make complacency our enemy. Tuesday is a great day to make your voice heard. Election Day is a perfect opportunity to push back against a culture of complacency.

We can do so by casting out ballot; and we can do so by refusing to demonize and dehumanize those whose ballots differ from ours. Ok...Let's take a deep breath...

At this point, I think we'd agree that stewardship isn't just about money. It's about all of our resources—our time, our talents, and our treasures.

But, might I suggest adding one more word to that familiar trio—one more “T” word: time, talents, treasures, and trust.

If stewardship really is a matter of the heart, then we have to trust in Christ to multiply our offerings and make them into something more. Because, if given in love, what we give can shine light into darkness.

Our offerings can be a source of liberation, my friends! They can transform injustice into justice. They can turn apathy into urgency—cynicism into hope—condemnation into mercy.

This isn’t idle chatter, folks. It isn’t speculation. This is what’s possible when we believe—when we put our hearts in the places that can make a difference. When our values align with God’s love, anything is possible.

And when we do this, we echo those familiar words we’ve already sung with joy this morning. Those words become not something to aspire to—not something ideal, but something real...

“Riches I heed not, nor vain, empty praise; thou mine inheritance, now and always; thou and thou only, first in my heart, High King of Heaven, my treasure thou art.”

May our Lord—our Christ—always be our greatest treasure.

Amen.