

Isaiah 1:1, 10-20
Psalm 50:1-8, 22-23

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

Our gospel lesson this morning has a rather interesting juxtaposition in the first paragraph. Jesus declares, “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.”... “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” We find here an interesting juxtaposition of anxiety and material wealth, fear and our possessions. Let’s break this apart.

First of all, the phrase that many people might recognize, although they may not be able to tell you it is from the Bible: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” It is very significant that Jesus did not say, “For where your heart is, there your treasure will be also.” You would think that wherever our focus is, wherever our heart is, the money will follow. But we know this is not true. Jesus knew that our treasure, our money, most likely, does not follow where we may think our heart is. He knew that for us where our treasure is, there is where our hearts truly are. Our checkbooks are the best indicator, the best barometer of where our hearts truly are, of what we truly cherish in our lives. What are our true treasures?

Then Jesus warns us that our treasures are not very secure. Possessions, material wealth, are vulnerable, they do have risk. We call stocks and bonds and other investments “securities,” but are they really that secure? Tom Long reminds us that investments are always at peril. It is never safe. Cash can be stolen; Porsches and Cadillacs rust, corporations collapse; moths eat dinner jackets. The “lifestyles of the rich and famous” are lifestyles of the always vulnerable and ever fearful. Deadbolts, safety-deposit boxes, tax shelters—none of them finally protect what we really desire; none of them make secure a treasure worthy of our hearts.

We try to protect ourselves from such risks. A South African inventor has designed a device to make cars secure from car-jackings, one of the country's most common crimes. At the push of a button this device spews flames from the side of cars. The so-called Blaster can inflict third- to first-degree burns on robbers who try to force motorists out of their vehicles. To activate the system, the motorist has to push a button or pedal that releases liquid gas from a bottle in the trunk of the car. The gas flows to two jets under the car doors where it is ignited by an electric spark. As a result, balls of fire shoot from beneath the doors. One of the first people to install it in his car was a policeman, Superintendent David Walkley. Sounds like something you would see on James Bond movie! However, this is for real! What we will do for security!

We desire security for we live in anxious times. There is so much to fear. Terrorism around the world. The war in the Middle East going on for far too long. The economy. The wages of the poor and the middle class staying flat while the incomes and personal wealth of the rich grows immensely. Hunger. Poverty. Homelessness. It is impossible to escape: schools, night clubs, places of employment, theaters, are not as safe as we would hope they would be. Even if you decide to stay in your homes, the newscasters will list off the bad news for the day, texts crawl at the bottom of television screens, information updates flash on your smartphone, tablet, or computer. Spam emails announce that we are doomed if we do not buy the right product or service immediately! Stolen identities. People use information they have illegally gleaned from our records to cheat us out of money, often times requiring weeks if not months to clear. We live in anxious times, and anxious times plead for security.

Jesus encourages us to, "Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys." Our passage begins with Jesus encouraging us to "not be afraid..., for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." This is not a God who, after creating the universe, sits back and dispassionately watches everything unfold. The passage immediately prior to ours for this morning is a passage about anxiety. That passage begins, "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear." Jesus goes on to declare that our God attends to sparrows, ravens, and lilies, a God whose concern for humankind extends to the very hairs on our heads, a God whose desire is to give the treasure of heaven.

On Black Monday, October 19, 1987, when the Dow plunged 508 points, . . . at the request of the Pacific Stock Exchange, a suicide watch was placed on the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. During the same week, in Miami, a longtime speculator who lost large sums in the market's crash walked into the local Merrill Lynch brokerage office and requested to see his broker and the office manager. He opened his briefcase, took out a handgun, and shot and killed the two men and himself. A friend commented, "His entire life was devoted to the market, and it collapsed around him." The god that he trusted had let him down.

Jill Duffield, Editor and Publisher of *Presbyterian Outlook*, wrote:

We can live fearlessly because we have Jesus. We belong to God. It sounds simplistic. Maybe it is trite to some, but it is truly powerful. Living fearlessly in faith enables us to free our energy, our imaginations, our intelligence for the present and coming Kingdom. ...Living unafraid makes us ready to act in ways that please the Master.

Living unafraid, living trusting in God, allows us to live life at its fullest. In the 1930s, the San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge was under construction. During the first part of the

project, the construction company installed no safety device. Twenty-three workers fell to their deaths. For the last phase of the project, a huge net was deployed, at a cost of \$100,000—very big money in the 1930s. Today's dollars would be about \$1.7 million! At least ten men fell into the safety net and were saved. That was a marvel in itself, but the most remarkable thing of all is this: From the day the net was hung, the steelworkers accomplished 25 percent more work. That's how important it was to be assured of their security. A sense of security enables us to do greater things.

Jesus calls us to a different kind of economy than the world experiences. God's reign is not marked by poverty and deprivation of material goods that are due to the competitive accumulation of possessions, but by their abundance that flows out of God's own sufficiency and generosity. Our problem is that in the wealthiest nation the world has ever seen, we operate on a basis of scarcity. God's kingdom is a kingdom of generosity. "Sell your possessions and give alms is the hallmarks of this different economy, where alms-giving is not just a doling out of extras, but is a fundamental reallocation of material and social goods according to the canons of justice. Such heavenly treasure is indeed what makes one "rich toward God" in the flowing together of love of neighbor and of God that characterizes God's reign.

Tom Long writes that what we really desire is to count—to count for something and to count to someone. To come at the end of a day—or the end of a life—with the satisfaction of having stood for what is good, with the joy of having been loved and having loved well in return, and the peace of having walked with God—these are true treasures, the treasures of the kingdom, a fortune that no thief can steal.

In the name of Christ, our all in all..