
Ordering Disordered Lives

A sermon by Canon Wallace Marsh
Proper 15 – Year C

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The first of August is always a special time for me. I celebrate my birthday on the fourth and the anniversary of my ordination on the eleventh. Inevitably, one of those numbers catches me by surprise. And this year, I am surprised it has been 9 years since I was ordained a priest.

One of the great joys of being a priest is being with people during the intimate moments of life. We stand on holy ground as couples make vows to one another. We are invited into hospital rooms to bless babies. We baptize. We pray with those going through difficult circumstances, and are invited to be present as people transition from this life to the next.

For 9 years now, I have entered the room of people in the last days of their lives, and seen a pattern repeated over and over again. When I enter a room, the family informs me of their loved one's accomplishments: where they went to school, their professional success, and how many boards they were asked to serve on.

Yes, these are important things the family wants to be made known during the loved one's funeral; but, the person facing death wants to take the conversation in a different direction; they want to talk about heavenly treasures.

When I sit at their bedsides, I don't hear stories about careers and financial successes; I hear stories about loved ones and special moments.

I have relived duck hunts, quail hunts, and countless golf rounds...sometimes I hear those stories more than once! I have relived family vacations, awkward dinners, first dates, marriages, and the birth of children.

I have heard about the joys and struggles of raising children, and can tell you that most parents seriously consider disowning their children at least 4 or 5 times in their life.

In 9 years as a priest, I have been taken me to some holy places, by some very holy people, who have taught me about a verse in today's gospel, "Where your treasure is there your heart will be also."

I am sure that you have had similar experiences. You have had a heart to heart conversation with a loved one who is sick or dying. I imagine they taught you about the treasures of this life.

Some of you lost a loved one suddenly, or perhaps you received an unexpected medical diagnosis, and that moment changed everything. You began to realize where treasures are to be found.

Or maybe you survived a car wreck, or felt as though you were given a second chance at life.

Whatever happened, it made you step back, take a deep look at life and realize "where your treasure is there your heart will be also."

It is no coincidence that Jesus speaks these words in the context of "the unexpected hour," in other words, death. Jesus wants the disciples to see that the real treasures aren't the possessions we acquire; they are the memories we create.

Yes, the Christian life is about creating holy memories. When Jesus calls the disciples, he calls them into something terribly amazing. He calls them into a life of following the Holy Spirit, practicing compassion, loving unconditionally, and being transformed by the resurrection.

Christians who have followed this call have lived amazing and memorable lives.

We have heard about some of their stories in our summer series. If you missed that series check out the podcasts.

Many of the saints we have discussed understood Jesus' words, "where your treasure is there your heart will be also." Thus, they ordered their lives around heavenly treasures instead of the earthly ones.

These saints were ordinary people who became exceptional because they managed to order their lives around the promises made at baptism.

During the baptisms next week, notice the prayers. We will pray for Christians to have "hearts full of grace and truth," that our lives "will be full of God's holy and life-giving Spirit," that we will "love others in the power of the Holy Spirit," and we pray to be sent into the world.

Our prayer at baptisms is that our lives are ordered around the heavenly and holy.

But here is the problem. We know how we are called to live. We have plenty of examples of how we should live, but we devote our lives to pursuing earthly treasures...

Some would even say that our constant pursuit of earthly treasures is a form of worship (it is idolatry). All we need to do is look at ourselves and those around us to see that this is true.

The fact of the matter is our lives are so out of order, it is almost impossible to imagine a way to reorder them. This is why so many people start living life the moment they have been told they are dying. That news becomes the catalyst for reordering life.

So, how did generations of Christians and great saints reorder their lives? How did they go from pursuing earthly treasures to heavenly treasures? How did they do it?

As today's scripture indicates it involves the heart...

John Wesley's life was reordered when he felt his heart strangely warmed. Pay attention to when your heart is strangely warmed by the Holy Spirit because something amazing is about to happen.

In his letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul tells Christians they need to "open the eyes of their hearts" (Ephesians 1:18). When the eyes of our hearts are open we start noticing God's presence, we begin responding to God's call, and our lives begin to take a different shape.

During my final year of seminary, I served as a Chaplain at The Episcopal Church at Yale. That year we invited Harvard Chaplain and famous author, Peter Gomes, to be our guest preacher.

Peter Gomes told a bunch of students that being a Christian makes you different from others in society. Gomes told us that Christians are called to go into the world with "Thinking Hearts and Loving Minds."

He said when you go out into the world with thinking hearts and loving minds you discover the heavenly treasures and are able to order your life around them.

As we approach this new programmatic year (and new school year), I challenge you to use your thinking heart and loving mind to discover those treasures. And when you have an idea of what those treasures might be, imagine what life would be like if you ordered your disordered life around them.

Jesus says, "For where your treasure is there your heart will be also."

AMEN.

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