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August 11, 2019 Pent. 9C  
Gen. 15:1-6; Heb. 11:1-3,  
8-16; Lk. 12:32-40

## Shared Treasures

This morning Jesus invites us to go on a treasure hunt. But we are not to look in the usual places such as safety deposit boxes, bank accounts, treasure chests buried deep within the earth, or in vaults where money is minted and stored. Jesus cautions us against look in the usual places and rightly so. Did you hear about the 2.5 million dollars worth of pesos that were stolen from a vault in Mexico City this past week? No, we are told to look in a heavenly place beyond the reach of moths and thieves and to make purses for ourselves that last. It is a treasure that is filled with Jesus' promises of faith, hope, and love.

The treasure of hope was arguably the greatest of treasures for those first Christian communities. Having suffered greatly under multiple persecutions, they yearned and prayed fervently for Christ to return and, yet, the kingdom Jesus had promised them before he died was nowhere in sight. What they could clearly see--the kingdom that counted—in terms of controlling and regulating their daily lives—well, that was a kingdom run by Rome and must have appeared as a kingdom that had no end.

And yet, these early faithful Christians held onto the hope of God's promised treasures through the give and receiving of Holy Communion, the study of the sacred scriptures, and the love they offered to each other. Despite their discouragement, they kept on loving each other and reaching out and bringing in those who had either lost all of their treasures or had been denied access to them. They had begun to discover a core principle of God's kingdom: that sharing treasures leads to renewed, restored, and healed hearts.

Fast forwarding into the future, approximately 150 years later, the Christian community through faith, perseverance, hard work, and grace had grown and had accumulated earthly possessions and wealth. On August 4, 258 Pope Sixtus and his seven deacons were arrested in the catacombs of Rome. One of the deacons there, was archdeacon Laurence, who in the face of his martyrdom, had this to say when the Roman guards questioned him as to the whereabouts of the church's treasures. "The treasures...well, they are right here. Let's walk out to the street and see."

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Gathered there were all the sick and poor of the City of Rome that just hours earlier had received all of the Church's financial reserves and valuables through the network of Christians who lived there. "Look here, dear soldiers, this is where the true treasures of the church belong for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Needless to say, the emperor was not amused, and legend has it that St. Laurence was roasted alive on a gridiron. And yet, even under these grim circumstances, the sharing of earthly treasures had led to renewed, restored, and healed hearts among those most in need of the spiritual treasures of faith, hope, and love.

Usually the threats to our earthly treasures are less dramatic than the threat of execution by a tyrannical leader. Thieves are still a concern to us to this day and sometimes even moths—as my nice Pendleton wool sweater will attest to-- but so are stock market fluctuations, high taxes, currency fluctuations, litigation, climate change, and trade tariffs. These threats often put us on the defensive and we then travel down the road of scarcity, fear and protectiveness.

This has tremendous impact on us spiritually, as well, and puts us at risk of developing personal theologies that place the focus of concern and emphasis on seeking comfort, security, and personal salvation rather than on sacrifices, risk-taking, and considering what might benefit all of God's people—not just a privileged few. I believe this type of theology poses the greatest risk to all of us because it is so culturally approved of and therefore, we are often blind to it.

I have recently discovered a distinctively Anglican treasure I would like to share with you that speaks to this concern. Many of you have visited Westminster Abbey, in London, England--the site of coronations, burials of notable national dignitaries, royal weddings and other ceremonies and events of significance in Britain's long history. It's a place you can clearly get lost in and I clearly do every time I visit a place like that. For I am always looking for treasures large and small overlooked by the agendas of tour guide leaders and their loyal followers.

In one of the many chapels at Westminster Abbey is a small stone in front of the altar which reads F. Lewis Donaldson 1860 to 1953. Frederick Lewis Donaldson was an outspoken and social activist priest who held the office of Canon of Westminster and Assistant Dean for 23 years. He is known for his strong and prophetic opposition to WWI, support of the rights of workers and the unemployed, and advocate for women's suffrage (a very early supporter I might

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add). He deeply understood that there has always been a connection between faith and money, between earthly treasure and heavenly treasure.

On March 20, 1925 he delivered a sermon in Westminster Abbey entitled “Seven Social Evils” that later became known as “Seven Social Sins.” In this prophetic sermon he identified seven temptations that he believed threatened our ability as Christians to live into the Kingdom that Jesus had laid out for us and kept us from receiving the heavenly treasure that we have been promised.

The seven social sins are as follows and I believe are as relevant today as there were almost one hundred years ago:

Wealth without work.

Pleasure without conscience.

Knowledge without character.

Commerce without morality.

Science without humanity.

Religion without sacrifice.

Politics without principle.

Six months later after Donaldson gave his sermon, Mohatma Gandhi published this list of social sins in his weekly newspaper *Young India*. Gandhi emphasized the importance of knowing this not only through the intellect but also through the heart. Like Jesus, he believed the spiritual principle that governs all actions have to do with the non-violent pursuit of what is good and a treasure for all people, and not only for a privileged few. As Christians we need to come to believe that if what we say and do isn't aimed at being a treasure for all people it is in fact not at treasure at all.

If we are not careful, we can spend most of our lives looking, working and protecting our treasures but the most important treasure is already here and can be found within our hearts. It is known as love and its value increases only when we give it away and share it with others because it is only by sharing our deepest gifts and treasures that human beings can be renewed, restored, healed and activated so they can bring about God's kingdom.

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What God expects from you and me depends on the opportunities that he places in front of us to love, serve and bless others in our daily and ordinary lives. We need to keep our eyes open to see these possibilities, and as the Gospel reminds us today, “be dressed for action and live with our lamps fully lit” so we can find where our true treasure lies. Amen.