



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

December 28, 2014

"True Treasure" - Matthew 6:19-24

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I am not surprised that the most common command in the Bible is some version of "Don't be afraid." Following that command is easier said than done sometimes. Life can be filled with lots of things that we can get anxious about. In fact, we spend a lot of time and effort trying to deal with the uncertainties of the future. The section of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount that we're going to look at today is about living with less anxiety and fear. That would be a great goal for the New Year.

I love the movie "Apollo 13", starring Tom Hanks. Even though most of us know how the story ends, that film jacks up the amount of adrenaline coursing through my body every time I watch it. You know the story. 200,000 miles from the earth on their way to the moon, the crew simply stirred the oxygen tanks and suddenly there was a massive explosion. Way out there in the inky blackness of space their little ship was now venting oxygen into the vacuum of space. They were in big trouble. You heard the line said by Jim Lovell, the commander of the flight, just after the side of their spacecraft blew off into space. "Houston, we have a problem!"

I think one of the keys to the Christian life is our capacity to say something like that about our own lives. Saying something like that is the way we start our journey as Christians and it's something we

need to be able to admit sometimes if we hope to grow as followers of Jesus. "Hey! I've got a serious problem here and there is no way that I am going to be able to fix this on my own." Our capacity to acknowledge that about our lives sometimes is absolutely essential if we ever hope to experience the life Jesus Christ promises us.

One of the things I love about "Apollo 13" is that when Jim Lovell said, "Houston, we have a problem," thousands of people on the ground started working to save the lives of those three men. A public that had become increasingly complacent with human beings flying off to the moon was once again riveted to every single word coming from Houston, Texas and from that broken down spacecraft.

Can you imagine the anxiety those three men must have felt? Can you imagine what went through their minds as they contemplated their fate? Can you imagine how challenging it was for them to stay focused? Those three guys would NOT have survived if they had not acknowledged the predicament they were in and then followed the procedures the people on the ground created in order to save their lives.

Today's text is from what is called the Sermon on the Mount, which is Jesus' most famous

sermon. This sermon is the equivalent of spiritual smelling salts. What Jesus offers is straightforward, no nonsense help for people who know they're in need. In this section of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus speaks to us about anxiety. What He says here is pointed, direct and uncomfortable—but He says it to make our lives better, less anxious and more filled with peace.

He tells His disciples that there are two kinds of treasures competing for our allegiance; there are two ways of viewing the world and there are two kinds of masters. And He says there is one very significant indicator, a barometer of sorts, which will help us evaluate which kind of treasure we are working for, what kind of vision of life we have, and who or what it is we're serving. Our level of anxiety is that barometer. There are two kinds of treasures; there are two kinds of visions and two kinds of masters. What Jesus says in this part of His sermon is simply and profoundly this: Where we're aiming our lives will determine the degree of peace we have or the degree of anxiety we live with.

First, let's look at Matthew 6:25 and you'll begin, I think, to see what I'm talking about. In verse 25 Jesus says, "Therefore, do not worry about your life..." The first word in that sentence is the word, "therefore."

Whenever you see the word “therefore” in the Bible you need to ask yourself for what reason is that word there? What is it “there for”? It’s a word that links what comes after it with what came before.

What Jesus talks about in verses 25-34 is about living with less anxiety. And He thinks living with less anxiety has everything to do with the decisions you and I make about treasures, about vision and about masters. Make better decisions about which treasure you pursue, have the right vision and choose wisely who or what will master your life...and you will live with greater peace and far less anxiety. That’s Jesus’ thesis in this section of His sermon.

Let’s back up now to what Jesus says just before He starts talking about living with greater peace and less anxiety. What He focuses on, starting in verse 19, is what we all tend to do in an effort to secure our lives. Beginning in verse 19 Jesus talks about decisions we make about treasures, vision and masters.

First, treasures. Matt. 6:19: *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; **20** but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. **21** For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

He then becomes an ophthalmologist and turns His attention to our vision in Matthew 6:22 *“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; **23** but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in*

you is darkness, how great is the darkness!” (The word translated “healthy” is related to personal wholeness, undividedness. The word means uncomplicated simplicity, and is the opposite of being divided or having a dual focus. The eye is like a window and what we let through that window will impact our lives.)

And finally, who or what is leading our lives? Matt. 6:24: *“No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth”* (that’s the Greek word, “mammon”; we’ll come back to that in a minute. It means much more than money. It’s a word that includes money in its definition but it also refers to so much more than that).

At first glance this passage sounds like it’s just a random collection of sayings but it isn’t. It’s one carefully crafted challenge with one basic message about dealing with anxiety. If we live with a lot of anxiety, Jesus says we need to make different decisions about these three things, about treasures, about vision and about masters.

It’s very interesting to me that the first thing Jesus says about us is that all of us are by nature, investors. You and I are always looking for something we can invest in, in the hope that it will make us secure in light of the insecurities of tomorrow. Jesus knows that about us. He knows all about our insecurities and He knows there are basically two kinds of treasures we can invest in. His simple advice to us is, don’t be stupid. Don’t bank your life on the treasures of earth. Treasure the right treasures. Jesus does not tell us not to be

treasurers. And He’s not against making wise financial plans or securing the best education we can and managing our money well. Jesus does not say it is wrong to treasure treasures for ourselves. He expects us to treasure treasures for ourselves. The issue is what kind of treasure will we ultimately build our lives upon?

Jesus is not saying we’re selfish for storing up treasures on the earth. He’s saying we’re foolish if that is the primary focus, the ultimate goal of our lives. When our lives are consumed with storing up treasures on earth we’re not looking out for what is actually best for us. If you want to live a truly secure life focus your life on durable treasures, treasures that will last. And those durable treasures are the things of His kingdom. They involve the investments we make in people, in seeking justice, in sharing with others the good news of the gospel. Let me prove that to you. In fact, let me show you a group of Middle School boys who will demonstrate for us what Jesus is talking about.

Video: From CBS News On The Road (http://youtu.be/0Ejh_hb15Fc)

What those Middle School boys do together illustrate a number of important life lessons. First and foremost, those guys teach us about the kind of investments that are the most important and those are the investments you and I make in other people, especially in those who are overlooked, on the margins, forgotten, those who often seem unimportant. Those investments are the kinds that change the world and they are the kinds of investments that change us.

Do you want to see your life, your priorities, your passions transformed in 2015? Do you want to be set free to live with LESS anxiety and greater joy and meaning and purpose? Then look at what Jesus tells us next. The kinds of investments Jesus talks about here include the investments of time and effort that we make in others. And it includes what we do with our money.

In this passage Jesus says something truly remarkable and counter-intuitive. He tells us that our hearts follow our investments. I would have expected Him to say, let your heart be changed first and your investments will change. He doesn't say that. That can happen. Your heart can be changed and when it is changed, what you invest in will change. But Jesus knows that our investments, particularly our money, don't necessarily follow our hearts. In the Bible the heart refers to the control center of our lives. Our hearts will go to where we make our investments.

So if we want to experience transformed hearts and priorities, make the gutsy decision to make different investments. I love what Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, "Sometimes those who obey end up believing." There is great wisdom in just making a decision to do what Jesus tells us to do with our time and treasure and when we do what He says, we often discover that He is the smartest person who ever walked the face of the earth. Our obedience leads us to believe.

Do not treasure treasures on earth as your ultimate treasure. All of these treasures are subject to corrosion. Nature eats away at them. Time eats away at them and humanity's sinfulness eats away at them. Moths, rust and thieves consume earthly treasures. There is

only one safe kind of investment and that is the investment we make in the treasures of heaven, the things of God. Those are the things that nothing can compromise—neither moth, rust, thieves, disease, nor death.

To live lives with less worry anxiety we need to make different decisions about what we ultimately treasure. And we need to examine our vision. Matt. 6:22: *"The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; 23 but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!"*

We all have a worldview. We all have a frame of reference like I talked about last Sunday, a set of presuppositions we hold that shapes how we interact with others and with ourselves. Our vision of reality, including what we look at, affects everything about who we are. What we let in our physical eyes see will impact us emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. What we fix the eyes of our heart on determines everything else about us. E. Stanley Jones once said, "What gets our attention, gets us". We become like what we fix our vision on. We either focus on the things of the One who is the Light of the World or we focus on the things of this world, and Jesus tells us that some of those things are the things of darkness.

It's hard to feel secure in the dark. Can you imagine what those astronauts felt like in that crippled spacecraft with the lights turned off to save power, sitting there in the darkness of space, hundreds of thousands of miles away from home? I have been on too many outdoor expeditions where we've

spent too much time on a mountaintop and had to hike down to our campsite in the gathering darkness. That is a dangerous thing to do. We all know what it is like to try and grope our way through the house, searching for the light switch in the middle of the night. What we focus on, our vision for our lives, has an enormous impact on who we are and whether we live in confidence and growing peace or in uncertainty and fear. Will we let the light of Christ illuminate our lives and our path?

To live lives with less anxiety we need to make different decisions about what we treasure. And we need to examine our worldview, the things we look at and allow into our lives. And if we want to experience more of the peace God promises us, then we need to take a closer look at who or what really controls our lives.

Matt. 6:24: *"No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."*

Jesus seems to believe that everyone serves some kind of master. No matter how independent or free you think you are, you are serving some master even if that master is yourself. And let me just say this bluntly. If you are your own master and you think you are living a truly free life, then Jesus Christ would say that you are living in a delusion. True freedom, real freedom is found in being a servant of Jesus Christ.

What's interesting to me here is that Jesus doesn't say you MUST not or you SHOULD not serve two masters. Jesus is just stating a fact.

It is impossible to serve two different masters. You CANNOT SERVE both God and the pursuit of personal wealth as an ultimate goal.

Because most English translations of the Bible have been done in wealthy countries this word "mammon" is often translated with the word "money" or in the case of this translation we're using today, the word, "wealth." But the word "mammon" cannot be reduced down to money. Mammon literally means, "that in which one trusts". Mammon is anything or anyone other than the living God in which we seek ultimate security in the face of the insecurities of the future.

Many kinds of mammons are good: families, jobs, pension plans, gifts and abilities, relationships. When we take really good things and make them ultimate things, is when we turn good things into counterfeit gods. We end up selling out to these false gods in an attempt to assuage our anxiety in the face of uncertainties about the future. Jesus does not judge these mammons. He's simply stating a fact: "You cannot serve both these mammons and the living God when you make these other things ultimate things in your life".

Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, "Our hearts have room for only one all embracing devotion". All of us are always living on the brink of idolatry and it is extremely easy to slip into the worship of false gods in an effort to deal with our fears.

Look at the logic of what Jesus is teaching. Our decisions about treasures flow out of our vision of reality and our vision of reality flows out of the decision we make about the God we choose to serve.

Let's be honest about this. The choices we are making about treasure, about vision and masters impact who we are and how we experience life. We are anxious when we are devoted to treasures that are unstable. We are anxious when our vision is clouded by the values of a culture that can be at times incredibly unstable and is often busy chewing people up right and left. We are anxious when we serve all sorts of counterfeit gods. None of these things can give the security we seek.

What I have discovered, and am discovering, is that it is only Jesus Christ Who can give me the peace I long for in my life.

Treasures laid up in heaven, a vision focused on God's kingdom and priorities, and a life that is being led by the One who created us and knows us the best is what makes a life of peace, deep peace possible.

Moses, the great leader of the Israelites, once said to his people at a critical moment in their history. "See, I have set before you a choice between life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life so that you and your children may live."

So, on this last Sunday of 2014, I'm setting before all of us that same choice. Choose real life and know more of God's peace. It's all about treasures, visions and masters.

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Note: Sunday sermon texts are also available at fpchawaii.org. The audio version can be downloaded from iTunes. It can also be sent to you by e-mail. You may also request the audio version by visiting: fpchkoolau@gmail.com