

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Ash Wednesday

February 17, 2010

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

I looked it up in my Greek New Testament. I was curious about the word treasure. Was Jesus talking about money or anything we treasure? Here is what I found.

The Greek word that is translated into the English word treasure is the word Thesauros. The verb form of the word means “to gather, to store up”. The noun means a collection, a storehouse, a treasure box, that which is stored up.

A little over a year ago I read a book by Mark Alan Powell entitled, Loving Jesus. A chapter in that book centered on the words: “For where your treasure is there your heart will be also.” Powell talked about money in that chapter – how Jesus does not say that the treasure follows the heart but that the heart follows the treasure. How we spend and give our money determines where our heart will be. What we store up determines what will matter to us. The more we invest, the more we care. When we give to the church or give to the poor our love for Jesus and for our neighbor is increased. As we store up money for ourselves this means that our heart is more focused on that trinity named me, myself and I. Jesus’ words can apply to money but if thesauos means anything stored up, gathered, or collected then other possibilities come to mind as well.

Sometimes we store up the hurts and slights that happen to us in life. We remember the time she said this to hurt me or he did that. Our heart is shaped by what we are storing.

Or we may store up what we hear on the 11 o’clock news. Fires and murders and robberies and scandals. As we fill ourselves with news of these things we become more and more anxious and fearful.

Or we can store up all of the blessings that we experience each day, kind words and help received. Then our hearts overflow with thanksgiving.

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

Most of the time I do not give much thought to what I am gathering. One day follows the next, yesterday's habits shape tomorrow. When I am in the habit of gathering money my heart always wants more, thinks it needs more. When I am in the habit of sharing money, giving even more seems right.

What does God want for your heart? That it would be generous and thankful and open to others. Or that you would be tightfisted, and feel abused and closed to others. Take care what you gather, what you read and who you listen to and what you set your mind upon. Your heart is being shaped by what you store up.

Jesus wanted his followers to gather the things that are pleasing to God. Think about that in these days of Lent. What will you gather? What will you store up? Is it something that God treasures?

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

This Lent practice generosity. Begin with yourself. Be as generous with yourself as Jesus is with you. Fill up your storehouse not with self-criticism or self doubt, dwelling on lost opportunities or what could have been. Fill up your storehouse with the love and forgiveness of Jesus. With Jesus every day is a new beginning. With Jesus every day you are a new creation. In every moment you are loved. Practice generosity toward yourself.

Practice generosity toward your neighbors. In the catechism Luther teaches that in speaking about our neighbor that we should defend our neighbor, speak well of our neighbor, and explain our neighbor's actions in the kindest way. Fill up your storehouse with generous thoughts about your neighbor and your heart will treasure her or him.

Practice generosity with your money. Give to the church, to charities, to support schools and libraries and programs that help kids. Be generous toward the poor and those who face severe challenges in life. You will find that you have less to criticize, more to rejoice in.

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust consume and thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither rust nor moth consume and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Amen.