

Hearts and Treasures

Rev. Patricia D. Barth

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Luke 12:22-34

Worry, worry, worry. Sometimes I think I have an advanced degree in worrying. God created us to be free people, with the ability to choose how we live our lives. But with free will, comes anxiety. Worry seems to be the human condition. For many people around the world who are barely scratching out a living for their families, the worries are pretty basic. A job that will provide the bare necessities: food, water, shelter, clothing and freedom from attack. The very poorest worry whether they will live to see another sunrise.

The more fortunate are still anxious. They worry about how to get ahead; how to buy more land; get a bigger house, a better job, more possessions.

Those who have all they need, and more, like most North Americans, are not free from anxiety. You would think that having more would keep the fear down but it doesn't. We worry about protecting ourselves, our possessions and maintaining our wealth. Things wear out. Moths eat clothing, and fashions change. Theft is always a danger. The stock market goes down. Worry creeps in. *"Do I have enough? I feel more secure with more. There is never enough."* Worries pile up as fast, if not faster than, our possessions.

Jesus teaches us not to worry. He says, *"Can any of you by worrying, add a single hour to your span of life?"* And, *"Don't worry about what you will wear, or eat—if worrying won't add an hour to your life, why worry about anything at all? God takes care of the ravens of the air and the lilies of the field; if God knows what they need how much more will our loving parent know what we need."*

But still we worry. In today's reading, Jesus offers us a radical cure for worry. Sell your possessions and give to the poor! Then you won't have anything to worry about anymore! Throughout history, radical Christians have done just that. Living simply is a long-standing Mennonite practice.

Others may be forced into simple living. There's a story about a Methodist pastor and his wife, who received a new church appointment every seven years as they often do. After every seventh annual conference, they would faithfully pack up their family and possessions and move to a new area. One year the couple came home from conference with their new assignment in hand, only to discover the parsonage and all their worldly goods burned to the ground. The wife said, "Honey, isn't this great? This will be the easiest move ever!"

Have you ever heard of John Freyer? He was a graduate student, a bit of a pack rat, packing his apartment full of stuff to move to a new university. He got to

thinking, *“What am I without the things I own? What would it be like to own nothing?”* So he had an inventory party, got his friends to help label all his possessions and put them up for sale on e-bay. Then he started his own website, www.allmylifeforsale.com, and began to sell things on that as well. People bought amazing things, like his salt shaker and an open box of taco shells. Individuals bought items for their own use, and art galleries bought things as conceptual art. Soon only his toothbrush and the rights to use the domain name were left, and he began an odyssey to visit the people who had purchased his stuff. He realized that the objects were not important, he didn't need to visit them, but the people were. His photographs of this adventure became the thesis for his photography degree, and were published in his book, *All My Life for Sale*.

John Freyer's question is a good one to ponder—*“What are we apart from our possessions?”* Jesus' answer is, *“A lot!”*

If we sell our possessions, and give alms, Jesus says we will make purses for ourselves that do not wear out like earthly purses. We will have unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. That is the key; treasure in heaven. *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

Where is your treasure? We've all heard the expression, *“Put your money where your mouth is.”* In other words, if something is important enough to you to talk about, then you should also invest in it financially. I was once reminded of that when I was talking to a friend about the importance of college ministry for young adults' faith development. As I spoke, I realized that I hadn't contributed to college ministry for a long time, and made sure to send a check as ecumenical campus ministry is always underfunded.

The reverse is also true; we spend money on what is important to us. Take a look at your checkbook; it will tell you where your heart is.

[At this time the congregation turned to their neighbors and talked about what their treasures are and where their hearts are.]

Individuals have treasures and so does the church. During one of the persecutions of early Christians by Rome, a magistrate targeted Laurence, the deacon who managed the church's finances. He demanded that Laurence turn over the wealth of the church. This was a tough moment. If Laurence gave up the money to the magistrate, he would fail the church. But if he didn't, he could be tortured until he revealed the money's location. Instead, Laurence took “the third way.” He pointed to a crowd of poor people, and said, *“Here is the wealth of the church. The poor, beloved of God, whom we have fed and clothed.”*

What is the treasure of Hyattsville Mennonite Church? I asked you this question before. At a congregational meeting we worked with the scripture about the “pearl of great price” that a man obtained by selling all he owned; the pearl being

the kingdom of God. We learned that these are the greatest “pearls” of HMC: the sense of community; commitment to peace and justice; excellent worship and music; the growing diversity; and the way the gifts of each member are shared in leadership. Also valued are fun, joy and laughter; children & youth; welcoming to all people; Anabaptism; and a sense of openness to searching and questioning. These are treasures indeed.

We also treasure the world here at Hyattsville Mennonite Church. I’ve just come back from annual meeting, and it seems to me that we treasure the world in a much larger sense than the rest of Allegheny Mennonite Conference, at least judging by the worship we participated in. I found the worship and discussions at the annual meeting very telling. Instead of the flow we have here, worship at the meeting seemed disjointed. There was no mention of peace, much less lighting of a peace lamp. I love testimony, the sharing of how God is working in your life or the life of others; but the personal sharing at annual meeting worship was overblown and almost unnerving. I’m a real proponent of evangelism, but it’s only part of the Christian life—peace and justice; healing and love to me are just as important. It’s as if the larger world was only brought into the sphere of the annual meeting for its conversion. “Conversion of hearts” was restricted to belief in Jesus Christ. The conference didn’t seem to have the world in its heart in the large way that Jesus did.

“Don’t be afraid, little flock; for it is the father-mother’s great pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Faith in Jesus Christ is an important part of the kingdom of God; but we have to remember what the one in whom we believe preached about: mostly the poor and those who were shut out of “polite society!” The poor, the marginalized; those who suffer from injustice; these are the treasure of God. They are in God’s heart; and they should be in ours, too.

I like the term “kingdom of God” because it expresses how I want Jesus to be the Lord of my life (a struggle, but I keep trying...). But there is another expression that says something equally important: “the kin-dom of God.” I know the notion of “kin” is a powerful one for Mennonites—(aren’t you all related??)—but actually we are all related, all of humankind, not just Mennonites and Pennsylvania Dutch. Relationships are of primary importance. God’s people, God’s kin, include those who do not profess the name “Christians.” The kin-dom is not an exclusive club of those who believe and think and act in only one way. Jesus stretched out his arms on the cross to embrace the whole world, not a little group of disciples only.

We are all living in God’s great heart. Within that large heart of love, we are all treasured; but God’s greatest treasure is the poor; the suffering; the disenfranchised; the marginalized; and the hated. Let us pray: *Holy One, we are your people and all the world is our kin. Help us to treasure our kin more, and to share the blessings you have given us financially and spiritually. Amen.*