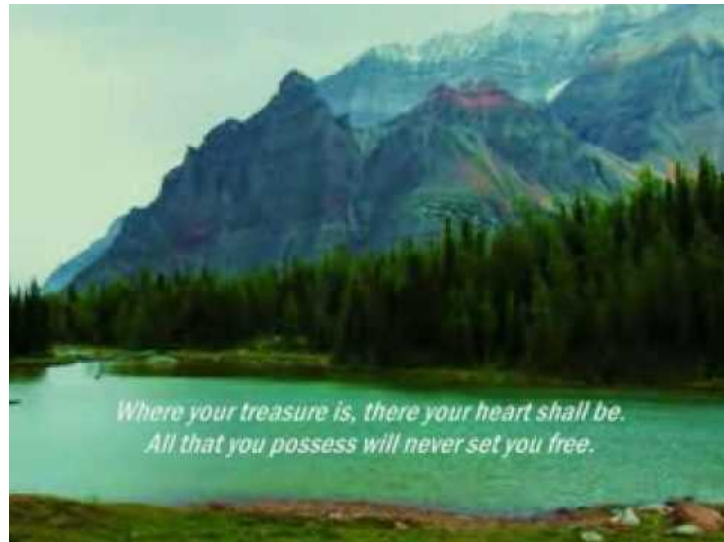


“WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS...”

*Script for Sermon Preached by the Rev. Douglas Clark, August 7, 2016
Ordinary 19 – FCCH, 9:30 a.m. – Communion by Intinction
“In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, diversity; in all things, charity”*

Scripture Reading: Luke 12:22-34 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gkuRdRkckjU>)

Jesus said to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”



This morning we continue our summer journey with Jesus through the gospel of Luke. Consider this morning's scripture text and sermon theme to be a continuation of last Sunday's message: one's life does not consist in an abundance of possessions. I could also call today's sermon "The Perils of Our Possessions – And the Promise of God's Providence."

Most if not all of us are willing to admit that we have too much stuff. And most if not all of us are willing from time to time to take a look at all our stuff, and to at least begin a process of decluttering, if not also downsizing and discarding and donating. We can make a free decision to downsize. Or we can wait until circumstances compel us to downsize. In either case, we will go through a discernment process about what to keep and what not to keep.

Karoline Lewis is a professor of biblical preaching at Luther Seminary in Saint Paul, Minnesota. She has a two-part commentary on last Sunday's and this Sunday's lectionary readings from Luke. The title of her commentary is "Treasured Possessions?" (with a question mark). In Part One she writes:

"We moved my mom into a nursing home last week...In addition to all of the difficulties with such a transition is, of course, what to do with one's possessions. While we may believe that we have been able to keep our belongings to a minimal level over the course of our lifetime, when you have to downsize, suddenly [you realize] you've become a hoarder and resemble far too closely the man in the story from Luke. My mother comes nowhere close to the TV show, but it is rather overwhelming to think about where all of her things are going to go—and to whom. And it causes you to wonder if you should start now—that is, sifting through your own belongings."¹

As I mentioned last Sunday, I'm starting the slow yet necessary process of sifting through many of my belongings, mostly for the purpose of decluttering my life, both materially and spiritually. I expect to ask myself two questions about each of my possessions:

- What memory, what relationship, what time in my life does this particular possession call to mind? Example: my mother's artworks.
- What purpose in my life does this particular possession serve, not only now but in the future? Example: the hand tools I use for trail maintenance.

I'm not about to get rid of my mother's artworks or my trail maintenance hand tools. But what about the books I won't ever read again, or the clothes I won't ever wear again? Ay, there's the rub! If my treasure is in things past, is that where my heart is also?

And what about our two churches? Have we invested our spiritual treasure only in a remembered past? Or might this season of transition be a time to invest our spiritual treasure in a future vision? Might God be calling us to

¹<http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=4693>.

envision a future that is grounded in a remembered past, but may also be quite different from a remembered past?

In recent weeks, as I've been listening for a word of God for us in Luke's story of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, I've been hearing both challenge and promise in this narrative. Here is what I've been hearing:

- God is calling our two churches to engage in ***prayer and discernment***. You are facing a time of transition that is both hopeful and anxious. The pastoral search committee will soon be hard at work receiving and evaluating profiles of pastors who have expressed an interest in serving as your next settled pastor. During this anxious time, I am hopeful that a small group of people, representing both congregations, will volunteer to be a prayer group: praying not only for the wisdom of the pastoral search committee, but also for the developing friendship between your two congregations.
- God is calling our two churches to engage in ***spiritual decluttering***. If we follow Marie Kondo's directions for tidying up, we will look carefully at all of our treasured traditions, and discern which of these traditions to keep and which not to keep.
- God is calling our two churches to engage in ***spiritual reinvestment***. If we are attentive to Jesus' proverbial saying—"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"—then we will need to be honest with one another about where our treasure is now, and where it needs to be in the future.

There is no doubt in my mind that we are living in troubled and anxious times. There is no doubt in my mind that as Christians and as congregations, we are bearers of a treasure in earthen vessels. The "earthen vessels" are our broken and beautiful lives, not only individually but also communally. And the "treasure" is the good news that in Jesus, our crucified and risen savior, God is reconciling us to one another, not counting our trespasses against us, and entrusting to us the ministry of reconciliation. Isn't this good news a treasure worth giving our hearts to? Isn't this good news a powerful antidote to anxiety?

Come fall, I hope to lead a series of congregation-wide conversations on these topics of prayer and discernment, spiritual decluttering, and spiritual reinvestment. For this morning, I want to leave you with Jesus' reassuring words that speak directly to the anxious times in which we are living.

There is no peace in stress or hurry
Do you not know that you are held within God's care?
Behold the lilies in their splendor,
In grace and beauty are they dressed...
How much more will those who look to God be blessed.