

Dear friends,

This week we hear Jesus tell his disciples not to be afraid for God is offering the kingdom – treasure is in heaven rather than on earth, because ‘where your treasure is, there will be your heart also’. The Gospel reading from Luke makes an astute connection between treasure and our emotions – between what we value and the values which drive us. The challenge is to understand what real treasure is – what is the treasure which will last for ever? Of course, it can be found right here and now for we can find it by looking at what God is doing all round us and then joining in the work of his kingdom. I hope you are all doing as well as you would hope, and I wish you every blessing. Margaret.

Call to worship:

As we come into God’s presence, let us open our hands and hearts,
let us invite God to fill us with the treasure of his Spirit – the treasure of his compassion for others –
and the treasure of his unconditional love for us.

God of all, we thank you for being with each one of us, wherever we are.

We thank you that in your presence we find heavenly riches beyond any earthly treasure.

As we come now to worship, help us to seek and find the treasure of your kingdom, so we can live our earthly lives holding treasure which will transform us – right here and right now.

We put our hope in the Lord;

the Lord is our protector and our help – the root of our gladness – and in the Lord we trust.

May your constant love be with us, Lord, as we put our hope in you. Amen.

The words to ‘New every morning is the love’ written by John Keble [1792-1866]**StF137**

1 New every morning is the love our wakening and uprising prove;
through sleep and darkness safely brought, restored to life, and power, and thought.

2 New mercies, each returning day hover around us while we pray;
new perils past, new sins forgiven, new thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven.

3 If on our daily course our mind be set to hallow all we find,
new treasures still, of countless price, God will provide for sacrifice.

4 Old friends, old scenes, will lovelier be, as more of heaven in each we see;
some softening gleam of love and prayer shall dawn on every cross and care.

5 The trivial round, the common task, will furnish all we ought to ask;
room to deny ourselves, a road to bring us daily nearer God.

6 Prepare us, Lord, in your dear love for perfect rest with you above;
and help us, this and every day, to live more nearly as we pray.

Prayer:

Right here, right now, we worship you, God of wealth and treasure, and we adore you.

Together, we come before you to share the riches of your glory – to feel and see and hear and know that you are in our midst.

You are not seated high on some heavenly throne – not ensconced in castle or palace – not protected by guards and walls. You, Lord God, are in our midst – alive, living and being amongst us.

We worship and adore you, here and now – no appointment needed. Amen.

We strive in life for things to make us comfortable – for things that give us pleasure.

We save in life, if we are able, for rainy days and stormy times, working to make life better, always hoping it will make us happier - burdening ourselves with so much so-called ‘treasure’ that often we cannot see the wood for the trees. We work to give enjoyment, but we struggle along the way.

Forgive us, Lord, and help us in a moment of reflection to see the damage that our ‘treasures’ can cause if they become the centre of our living.

Forgive us in our busy-ness to store up treasure here on earth, if we lose sight of the treasure that is you in the here and now and forgive us if in our busy-ness we fail to share your treasure with family, friend, foe and neighbour. Amen.

God, in his love for us, offers us – each and every one of us – forgiveness for our sins; for things done and undone, things spoken and unspoken.

God, in his love for us, offers assurance that our sins – yes, even ours – are forgiven.

So may we go into the week ahead sharing the treasure that is God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our hearts overflow with praise and thanksgiving as we realise that God is not ‘out there’, distant and seated high above us, but is here in this moment, not distant but close.

Our hearts overflow as God’s being infuses ours – as God’s love warms us, shelters and comforts us – as God’s Spirit gives us strength and hope, passion and purpose.

Our hearts overflow as we know we need not fear God and that his treasure is closer than we can feel and deeper than we can know – wider than we can see and more real than we can imagine.

Our hearts overflow that the place we have searched for is this place, and that the time for which we have been searching is here and now.

Our hearts overflow with praise and thanksgiving. Amen.

Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come and thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Luke 12: 32-40. [The New Testament *a new translation* Volume One – Gospels & Acts of the Apostles – William Barclay. Copyright William Barclay 1968]

You are only a little flock, but don’t be afraid. It is your Father’s decision to give you the Kingdom.

Sell your possessions and give them away in charity.

Get yourselves purses which will never wear out, and a treasure in heaven which will never be exhausted, for there no thief can get at it, and no moth can destroy it.

Your heart is bound to be where your treasure is.

Always be ready, stripped for action, with your lamps lit. be like men who are expectantly waiting for their master’s return from a wedding banquet, and whose aim it is to open the door to him the instant

he arrives and knocks. Happy are the servants whom their master will find awake when he comes. I tell you he will roll up his sleeves ready for action, and will make them sit down like guests, and will come and serve them himself. Happy are they, if he finds them like that, even if he comes just before midnight or in the early hours of the morning.

It is obvious that if the householder has known at what hour the thief was going to come, he would not have left his house to be broken into. You too must be ready, because the Son of Man is going to come at an hour when you do not expect him.'

Meditation of one of the crowd listening to Jesus. [A Most Amazing Man – year C; written by Nick Fawcett. Copyright 2009 Nick Fawcett]

A purse that never wears out – now I like the sound of that! Just imagine - pop your hand in your pocket, any time, anywhere, and there it is – cash on the nail, as much as you need.

This guy's really talking!

Only he isn't, for his sums don't add up.

'Sell your possessions,' he says, 'and give alms.'

Well, I'm sorry, but that's no way to invest for the future. You'll end up, more like, with nothing, relying on alms yourself – and we can't *all* do that, can we, for who'd be left then to give?

So what's he saying?

Don't tell me: it's about letting go of money and possessions – about understanding what's of real value, able to satisfy the soul; and, most of all, about receiving through giving – a generous heart compared to an avaricious spirit.

I was afraid you'd say that, for though I can accept it happily enough in theory, in practice it's another matter, being neither *my* way not that of the world.

We want treasure now *and* later – rewards in this life *and* the life to come – our hearts torn between God and self, heaven and earth, *both/and* rather than *either/or*.

I'll give Jesus this, he's put his finger on the problem, but that's the easy part.

It needs us to change, deep within, if we're to find the answer; our hearts to be re-aligned, turned round. Can he see to that too? I wonder.

Comment:

This passage is well into a long section of dialogue [12:1 to 13: 21] where Jesus is speaking and responding to questions from those who are already followers, those who oppose him, and those who are trying to make up their minds. Having urged his hearers to seek God's kingdom [vs. 31] he tells his disciples not to be afraid because God will give them the kingdom, drawing them into a supportive band of brothers and sisters in pursuit of the treasure God holds before them. This treasure is both here and now and off in the distance, but it is theirs because they have set their hearts on it.

But although the kingdom is a gift, it does not come to the passive. As we seek God's kingdom rather than our own material well-being, we need to be alert to what God is doing. These verses have the twin focus of Jesus' first and second coming – and we need to keep this in mind if we are to understand.

If we are going to lay hold of our treasure, we must lay down all the other things we cling to for security. Jesus contrasts the alertness of his disciples with the inattention of the Pharisees. The master [Jesus] came and found the disciples ready, so he served them and met their needs. This is indeed good news to the poor, the ministry Jesus has been engaged in throughout. But the banquet scene also has an eye for the future, on the great banquet the Messiah will throw for his faithful people when the

kingdom of God comes in its fullness. Then the social hierarchies – so precious to the Pharisees – will be meaningless. By implication, they should be meaningless now among God's people. Still on the theme of being ready, Jesus shifts the focus from the coming of the master to the coming of a thief. Such a coming is unexpected. Again, both present and future is in view. His first coming has taken the Pharisees and the crowds by surprise. Will his second coming similarly catch his followers off guard?

Prayer: Beware the thief who comes to steal your goodwill, and to fill the gap with cynicism. Pray that you will always believe the best of human nature, even in the worst of circumstances. Pray for those who are their own worst enemies.....

Beware the thief who comes to steal your generosity and fills the gap with greed. Pray for the opportunities to give of what you have as a lifestyle choice. Pray for those who live with little or nothing to call their own.....

Beware the thief who comes to steal your hospitality and who fills the gap with prejudice. Pray that you have the maturity to respond to the needs of others out of love and not fear.

Beware the thief who comes to steal your hope and who fills the gap with despair. Pray that you will trust in God's promises of a better way for the whole of creation. Pray for all who work for the coming of God's kingdom. Amen.

**The words to 'In heavenly love abiding' written by Anna Laetitia Waring [1823-1910]. StF 736
Based on Psalm 23.**

1 In heavenly love abiding, no change my heart shall fear;
and safe is such confiding, for nothing changes here:
the storm may roar without me, my heart may low be laid;
but God is round about me, and can I be dismayed?

2 Wherever he may guide me, no want shall turn me back'
my Shepherd is beside me, and nothing can I lack:
his wisdom ever waketh, his sight is never dim;
he knows the way he taketh, and I will walk with him.

3 Green pastures are before me, which yet I have not seen;
bright skies will soon be o'er me, where darkest clouds have been;
my hope I cannot measure, my path to life is free;
my Saviour has my treasure, and he will walk with me.

Close: God comes to us in places where we least expect to be surprised by grace: God of surprises, show us how to see you when our thoughts lie elsewhere.
God comes to us in the faces of those we least expect, to show us what it means to love and be loved: God of surprises, show us how to recognise you in those we meet.
God comes to us at times when we least expect to find encouragement and renewal: God of surprises, show us how to know you when our emotions are overtaken.
God comes in the unexpected: may we always be ready and waiting. Amen.

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