

Where Your Treasure Is ...  
Matthew 6:19-21  
August 28, 2022 – Center Harbor Congregational Church, United Church of Christ  
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Long before I became a Minister of Word and Sacrament, I worked in higher education. That sounds like just one kind of job, but really, I did a lot of VERY different things over the thirty years I spent there. I began at Mississippi State University, where I was the associate director of admissions. I was in charge of admitting foreign students, which meant figuring out their transcripts from all over the world. Then – in a bizarre twist – I became the director of alcohol and drug education. It was a HUGE shift, and one I was totally unprepared for! One month I was looking up some obscure university in Addis Ababa, and the next, I was giving presentations to huge auditoriums full of students, trying to convince them not to drink quite so much, a message they were not eager to receive!

Next, I made another huge change. I became the dean of students at Virginia Tech, in charge of new student orientation, disability services, multicultural programs, student conduct hearings, and emergency response for a campus with 27,000 students. That was a mind-blowing professional leap for me! Several years later, I made yet another shift – to assessing how much students were learning from their out-of-class experiences, like clubs and sports teams. Later still, at Bridgewater State University and Keene State College, I combined this assessment of student learning with what is called “institutional research.” I became a statistician.

As you can hear from this list, those are all jobs that require a great deal of expertise – expertise that I simply did not have when I began each one of those positions. But my father had taught me to proceed with confidence, while scrambling to learn what I needed. I became like a duck – cool and calm above the water line, and paddling madly below.

Where would I learn how to evaluate foreign transcripts, you might ask. Or, where could I learn to do substance abuse education? In those days, especially before the internet existed, the answer was to attend professional conferences – great gatherings of the few thousand people in the United States who DID know how to do those things. We would meet at some hotel or convention center or university and listen to speakers and workshops all day long. Those conferences were really intense learning experiences: eight hours a day of one totally new and deep subject after another.

Sometimes the organizers would take pity on us and schedule a lighter session in the late afternoon – something to keep us awake or entertain us a little, something less professional and more personal. I remember one particular conference very early in my career. The organizers scheduled someone to talk with us about work-life balance. Most of us were young professionals, with kids at home, struggling to learn our jobs or to move up to the next one, trying to remember which child needed to be taken to music lessons or scouts today. Work-life balance didn’t seem like an option for us. So, there we were in a large conference room, seated at big round tables, and the speaker walked among us, carrying her microphone. She came up to one participant and said, “Tell me what is truly important to you.” He said, “Well ... um, um ... my family is important to me, of course. And my job, and um ....” The presenter moved to another table and asked the same question again, and got another stammered response. Then a third. We were all wondering what she was getting at and hoping she wouldn’t wander in our direction.

Then she went to a table in the middle of the room and said, “Now SHOW me what is truly important to you.” The woman she was speaking to was confused. “What do you mean, ‘SHOW’ you? I don’t understand.” The presenter said, “Give me your checkbook and your calendar.”

“What!?!”

“When I ask you to TELL me what is important to you, you will give me an answer that shows what you want to believe about yourself, or what you think I want to hear. My family is important to me, and my job. But is your family really important to you? Is that how you spend your time? How you spend your time and your money SHOWS me what you really care about.”

Many of us are retired now, and we have the treasure of time that we did not have earlier in our lives. Do you remember as you were coming up toward retirement, saying to yourself, “At last I will have time to do that thing I have always wanted to do.” Is that how you have actually spent your time in retirement? I hope so! Where we put our time and our money shows what we really care about, and that is not always the same as what we THINK we care about.

That, my friends, is the first half of Jesus’ message to his disciples – and to us – in today’s scripture. Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. That is, I can see where your heart is by looking at where you put your money.

But Jesus says something else, too, something deeper. Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust corrupt and thieves break in and steal. Instead, store up treasures in heaven.... For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Do you hear it? Do you hear the shift? He says, you can choose to put your money somewhere else – you can choose to invest yourself in heavenly things and your heart will follow. This is more than being able to tell what you value by where you spend your money and your time. Jesus is saying that you can actually change your heart by making a change in how you invest yourself, by spending your money and your time differently. Invest in heavenly things, he says, and that is where your heart will be. If you choose to invest yourself differently, to spend your time and your money differently, your heart will change.

This is why regular giving to support God’s work is more than a budget decision, for our own budget or the church’s. Regular giving of our time and our money, in whatever amount we can afford, is a spiritual discipline. It gives us a personal stake in God’s work. It is like prayer or Bible study or coming to church. Regular giving invites us into partnership with God. It invites us to grow in our faith.

After our worship service this morning, we are all going to have a conversation about money. We are going to hear the results of the ad hoc committee’s work this summer and Su Mansur’s diligent work on our budget for next year. We are going to be asked to think and pray about how much we can give next year to support God’s work through the ministries of this church, and how else the work of the church might be sustained. We don’t have all the answers yet, but we are on a good path toward a sustainable future for the church. It is important that we be clear-eyed about the costs of operating this church, as we must be clear-eyed about our own personal budgets. But this is also a conversation about faith, about what we truly care about as a congregation, about who we are.

Jesus’ message to us, as we begin this conversation, is this: Where we put our time and our money, tells a lot about us. And making a change in how we invest our time and our money can change our hearts and turn them toward God.

May God bless this wonderful congregation as we seek to do God’s will.

Amen