

“Where your treasure is, that is where your heart will be also” Luke 12:34

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May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts, and the actions in our lives, be now and always acceptable in your sight, O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen

I noticed 6 themes in today's readings: worship, faith, action, being prepared, and putting priority on treasuring what God values. All good things to think about in our lives. Delving into these themes helps us understand what it means to be the church - to be disciples of Christ.

Worship is central and critical to our being the church, but the Isaiah reading, from 1st Isaiah, should be a vivid warning to us all. The warning for us is about presenting ourselves for worship while being party to unjust systems, abandonment of the marginalized and the destruction of our planet. God's words are pretty daunting: “I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity”. We are commanded, among other things to seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. Isaiah is saying God doesn't want worship that is insincere, he wants authentic worship from people who walk in God's ways. People who walk the talk!

At St. Peter's you have been encouraging one another not to think that we **go** to church, but that together we are the church. And we are not church just on Sundays, but all the time, 24/7. There is no time out from being a disciple of Christ and part of the Body of Christ, the church. This is exactly what Isaiah is getting at. God isn't interested in us making wonderful Sunday morning worship if we leave the building and carry on lives that ignore the injustices and inequities of our society - and these days that includes not ignoring the fact that our lifestyles and love of comfort are contributing to the destruction of the planet.

In the New Testament Jesus also instructs us to share the Gospel, the Good News of God in Christ. We are to do this both by our actions and through our conversations. The question is, how equipped do you feel to do this. What are you doing to increase your knowledge and skills in sharing the Gospel?

Disciples are students of a teacher - they sit at the feet of their teacher and learn. They then do their best to emulate their teacher. We are Christ's students. But sharing the Gospel seem scary. To be counter-cultural, which of course it is, that's the point.

Luke records that Jesus told the disciples, and us, that we should not be afraid, but trust in God. He said "it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom". Notice two things here, this time Jesus doesn't say "My Father", as in many other places in the Gospel, but "Your Father". Jesus is the Son of God, and we are grafted into Jesus's family through baptism, and so we become heirs of the Kingdom, God's adopted daughters and sons.

Just stop and let that incredible miracle sink in. God Almighty, who is beyond our ability to fully comprehend, has adopted us, not just as creatures - created beings, but as members of God's very own family. We are invited into the family of the Trinity, God the Father who created us and all things, God the Son, who redeemed us and God the Holy Spirit who sustains us. We become wrapped up in their eternal love.

Secondly Jesus said, "It is your father's good pleasure to GIVE you the kingdom". Notice, he doesn't say he offers you the prize of the kingdom if you earn it. It is God's good pleasure to give it to us. In fact, we cannot earn it, it is a free gift. We can accept it or reject it. We have that choice. Accepting it requires faith - we have to choose to believe in God, in Christ and in the gift of the Kingdom of God. This means believing things we cannot see. As the author of the letter to the Hebrews wrote: "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

I have good news for you. The kingdom of God is close to you - to experience it and to take our part in its completion, we just need to follow Jesus's instruction to build up heavenly treasures. He said "Where your treasure is, that is where your heart will be also." A worthwhile spiritual exercise is to think about what are these treasures and how they compare to those things we currently treasure. In his letter to the church in Galatia Paul wrote: "*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*". *Galatians 5:22-23*. We need to treasure these and diligently seek them. But the greatest treasure of all, is the gift of the Gospel. It's not a treasure to be locked away in a safe - its a treasure to be carried wherever we go. Its a treasure to be shared.

Unfortunately many have a much different list of treasures: wealth, power and comfort, among them. These are treasures which come from being human, but as adopted members of God's family we need to aspire to much greater treasures.

Here is more good news. God loves us and offers us the kingdom; Christ has died for us and taught us; and the Holy Spirit is in us and among us to inspire and strengthen us. And, we have one another, the Body of Christ. We become part of the body of Christ in baptism. Think back to the last baptism you witnessed. Do you remember that after the initial vows had been made by or on behalf of the candidates for baptism, the celebrant asked this question of all those assembled "Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support these persons in their life in Christ?". We were expected to answer, with a loud voice "We will". This promise extends beyond the ones being baptized that day - to include all the baptized. Being a Christian, a disciple of Jesus Christ, means loving your Christian sisters and brothers, even the ones that you find hard to like. It means doing all in your power to support them in their life in Christ. Ponder those words - all in your power! We gather together not just to worship but to support one another, to give one another hope, to help strengthen the other's faith, to teach, lead and serve one another. In gathering we know we are not alone and that we are loved.

Jesus gave the disciples a new commandment, to love one another. He said *"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."* John 13:35

I pray that the love of Christ is in each of you, and that you experience the love of God and Christ whenever you gather together. Amen

Rod August 7, 2022