

**August 11, 2019 Ninth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Pastor Carolyn Albert Donovan**  
**Peace Lutheran Church – Austin, Texas**

**GOSPEL**

**Luke 12:32-40**

The holy gospel, according to Saint Luke, the twelfth chapter.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

[Jesus said:] <sup>32</sup>“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. <sup>33</sup>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. <sup>34</sup>For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

<sup>35</sup>“Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; <sup>36</sup>be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. <sup>37</sup>Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. <sup>38</sup>If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.

<sup>39</sup>“But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. <sup>40</sup>You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

The gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

I imagine you’ve noticed

that anytime angels appear to bring humanity messages from God,  
they start out by saying, “Don’t be afraid.”

It sort of stands to reason that they only say that as a matter of habit,  
because every time they show up, people get scared.

Angels have such an oddly specific reputation.

I mean...despite having next-to-no detailed physical descriptions of angels in the Bible...

I bet you can imagine one right now.

Somehow we just all sort of agreed on the same made-up description.

By contrast, one of our Children's Bibles describes angels as "warriors of light" ...

which summons a slightly different mental image (at least for me) than the one we might be used to...

one easy to imagine might be terrifying.

My point in saying all this is really just:

when people have to preface their remarks by saying "don't be scared," generally speaking, people are already scared.

And Jesus' audience must be scared today, too,

because he begins by invoking the angel refrain: "don't be afraid."

The people are worried...

worried about their future, their safety, their livelihood.

The more things change, the more they stay the same...

We worry, and Jesus calls us out of the paralysis of worry and into the future...into transformation.

But...as usual...that future...that new life...

looks pretty different and pretty frightening...

compared to the everyday and predictable evils

that we already know so well.

We are very often content to live with the evils we know...

instead of risking something new...

Even if it is possible that something new will bring us great joy,

we might avoid it...because it also is risky.

What we know isn't perfect...but we do, at least, know it.

Jesus is calling us out of that kind of thinking.

He is inviting us into ways of living together that are totally new –  
caring for the poor without question,  
to watch vigilantly for what God is showing us in the world.

And he is giving us a trick to help us get from point A to point B...  
because he knows it isn't easy.

He says... "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

He doesn't say that your heart will guide your generosity.

It's exactly the other way round.

Jesus says, be generous...and watch you heart be transformed.

If you want to love something or someone...

throw some treasure in that direction. You'll be changed.

One of the professors at Luther Seminary was reflecting on this text,  
and he said that there was someone he admired  
who happened to be a very excellent tipper  
when it came to eating out and all those times in life  
when you can volunteer to help support them.

He decided to be a better tipper to be like this person he admired.

He explained that not only does he tip more...

but now, he also notices how many people in his daily life  
are reliant on those tips or extra income to make ends meet.

He shares in concern for these neighbors...

because his heart followed where he put his treasure.

The word Jesus uses earlier in this paragraph,  
when he speaks about giving is, "alms."

This is a very specific and different word than your regular offering.

Alms are specifically to offer to the poor.

They were beyond your usual financial commitment and gifts.

And...Jesus seems to be saying...they are necessary.

To give alms will teach your heart to follow and to love the poor,  
as both Jesus and the prophet Isaiah say we should, today.

Whether your treasure is your money or how you spend you time...

I challenge you to think of something  
you want to give your heart to more...or better.

Even if you aren't there yet...

if you don't care as much as you think you should,  
make the investment, even if it seems disproportionate...  
or even if you don't think you're ready.

If you've seen pictures from this year's Pride celebration,

you probably saw the mural that has three sets of wings and three halos...

It was painted so people could sit in front of it

and appear as the missing figures to complete the icon.

I have no idea how many hours of work Pastor Sharolyn

at Holy Cross Lutheran did to complete that mural...

but it was a huge project.

It was almost silly to spend so much time on a thing like that...but...

part of how we can live out our commitment to be a welcoming place  
is by extravagant choices like that.

Because our hearts follow our treasure...

and so the time we give to things like that

shape our hearts a little bit more towards who we hope to be.

Where do you want your heart to go?

How might you let your treasure lead the way?

There is urgency from Jesus in this invitation today.

He tells us that to do this work is one way to be ready for God's presence.

Because sometimes God sneaks in like a thief in the night.

Sometimes God surprises us

and shows up where we haven't learned to expect.

God always shows up in this gathering, at this meal...

And we also keep learning new things about who God is and who we are.

By discovering where else God chooses to be,  
whether that is an immigration detention center,  
among the most recent victims of a mass shooting,  
draped in a rainbow flag, or quietly tending a garden.  
And our hearts continue to grow closer to God and each other,  
when we follow Jesus' teaching to put our treasure  
where our heart wants to go.

Our national church gathering is coming to a close now in Milwaukee.

Hundreds of Lutherans from across the country have met and deliberated,  
worshiped and voted.

And they have made some beautiful, heart-filled statements...

about how we continue to repent of the legacy of racism,  
about how we affirm the image of God in those who are not male,  
about how we seek to be a community of sanctuary  
for the migrant and the stranger,  
about how we honor those called to all different types of ministry.

The national church gathering is great for making heart statements.

I will say, they hesitate to throw around our treasure.

They often stop short of committing resources  
to these statements they endorse.

So, now, as the assembly ends, that will become our work...

to listen to those heartfelt statements  
and discern where we should throw our treasure  
so our hearts can follow and be transformed by God.

Sometimes our wealth and possessions can be a prison...

but only when we try to build walls with them instead of bridges.

Where are you called...where *we* called...

to build bridges that will lead our hearts more deeply  
to the places we say we value most?

Don't be afraid...God rejoices in giving us the kingdom...  
And we get to discover it together  
through how we use the gifts God has given us...  
and that changes our hearts...and the whole world.

Thanks be to God. Amen.