

Streetsville United Church
Sunday, September 26, 2010
Rev. John Tapscott

"OUR GREATEST TREASURE"

Luke 12:34 "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

What is your greatest treasure? One man's is his 1956 Chevy convertible, painstakingly restored at the cost of \$100,000. Stored in a heated garage all winter, he takes it out for a drive on perfect summer days. But not too far, except for once a year when he drives it to a vintage car show in Ohio. Every day he's on line with fellow car enthusiasts. "Where his treasure is, there his heart is also." One woman's greatest treasure is her beautiful garden. She spends countless hours from spring to fall, planting, watering, weeding, pruning, fertilizing. She is modest about her achievement, but she is proud when a visitor admires it and compliments her. "Where her treasure is, there her heart is also." One family's treasure is their cottage on a lake near Haliburton. It is their getaway in summer and winter, their refuge from the city, a place of tranquillity and refreshment which they would never think of selling. It will become their retirement home in a few years. "Where their treasure is, there their heart is also."

We all have our special treasures and there's nothing wrong with that. All these good things are part of God's wonderful world. They enhance and enrich life. Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." And it's true, isn't it. Where our treasure is, that's where our devotion is and where we often direct our thoughts. But as wonderful as these treasures are, they pale in comparison to the one great treasure that God has given us.

Jesus once told this parable. "The Kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all he has and buys it." The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure which is worth all that we have. And once in history the Kingdom of Heaven came to earth in human flesh. God's Kingdom was seen in Jesus Christ and was present in all He did and said. Here is the great truth of the New Testament. Jesus Christ is our greatest treasure. There is nothing greater than to take hold of Christ by faith and to have him dwell in you and you in him.

Writing to the Philippians the apostle Paul says, "Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ...that I may know him and the power of his resurrection..." Paul came to see Jesus Christ as the great treasure, the greatest treasure one could possibly have. Christ is a treasure beyond price. But thankfully this treasure doesn't have to be bought. For God freely gives Christ to all who receive Him with open and believing hearts. Jesus Christ is our greatest treasure. And as we mature in the Christian life we realize more

and more what a great treasure Christ is. Christ may not remove all your other treasures, but he increasingly replaces them as your main treasure. More and more your heart is where Christ is. More and more you care about the things he cares about. Certain things happen in us as we come to know Christ as our greatest treasure.

For one thing, we begin to live with less fear.

How often Jesus said, "Fear not." In today's reading, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom." Jesus, who knew what was in us, identified fear as one of our biggest enemies. Even people who seem to have no reason to be afraid are often afraid. I was speaking to a fellow clergy last week. He had been golfing with a dentist friend. Now this dentist, according to my friend, has a magnificent home, 4 cars in the driveway, 2 kids in university and an annual income of \$300,000. I don't know about you, but an annual income of \$300,000 would take away most of my financial fears. Yet there on the golf course, this dentist confessed to his clergyman that he was afraid of losing it, afraid he might not be able to keep it up, afraid it might not be enough.

Our earthly treasures, no matter how big, never really take away our fear. And our fears are often centred around money and possessions, whether we'll lose what we have, or that we won't have enough. We have other fears too. We're afraid that someday we'll be found wanting, seen by others as not so competent and self-assured. More than once I've had a dream in which I'm standing here in the pulpit either without a sermon prepared or with the wrong one in hand, fumbling and stumbling and looking very foolish. Many of you have probably dreamed something like that happening in your own profession. Those dreams reveal some of our deepest fears. And anyone who really knows themselves has to be afraid of standing before God alone and unrobed on the day of judgement. Any sensitive soul has to be afraid of death in their secret moments. There are many fears deep within which can dominate and even debilitate us.

But as Christ more and more becomes our greatest treasure, the less and less our fears dominate us. "Fear not, little flock," he says, and he is the one who helps us to put our fears away. Listen to his words just before our reading, "Therefore I tell you do not worry...The birds neither sow nor reap yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! Your Father knows that you need these things...seek first the Kingdom of God and these things will be provided for you as well...Do not be afraid, little flock."

You see, these are the words and the promises of the Son of God who knew the mind and the will and the heart of the Father perfectly. The more we value Jesus, the more we know the Father and that he can be trusted. Of course, we have to work just as the birds have to work. But Jesus makes us less fearful because the Father knows what we need and provides it for us, indeed perhaps has already provided it for us to take hold of. It is God's good pleasure to give us Kingdom blessings now and forever.

Jesus by his perfect love, casts out our deepest fears. He died for our sins and covers us with the garments of righteousness so that we stand before God forgiven and accepted by Him forever. Jesus has conquered the power of death, so that sharing his risen life by faith, we have eternal life. "The Lord is my light and my salvation; of whom shall I be afraid? What can anyone do to me?" With Jesus as our greatest treasure we become less afraid of what others can do to us, because we know that nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love. We worry less what others think of us, because we already have God's good opinion. We are his beloved children. And we become less afraid and anxious for our families and loved ones, because we commit them by prayer and faith into the Father's hands. As Jesus Christ more and more becomes our greatest treasure, we live with less and less fear. "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom."

Then too, as Jesus increasingly becomes our greatest treasure, we become more and more generous.

In a great parable, Jesus told about a farmer who built bigger barns for all his grains and his goods, looking forward to years of ease and pleasure. And God said to him, "Fool, this night your soul is required of you. And all these things you have laid up, whose will they be?" Do we have to be reminded that one day we will leave all our earthly treasures behind, that we will have no more control over them and that they will belong to someone else? Jesus said, "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." Earthly treasures fade away, but through Christ we have an unfailing treasure in heaven.

That doesn't mean that our earthly treasure is worthless. Not at all. We can do much good right with it right now. As Christ becomes the greatest treasure in our hearts, our hands become more generous, and the strings around our earthly treasure loosen up. Paul writes in 2 Timothy 6:18&19, "Set not your hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. You are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for yourself the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that you may take hold of the life that is really life."

The clergy colleague I was talking to also told me something interesting about his mother. He said that when she died, there was only enough in her account to bury her. He said she netted out at zero. But he said that at her funeral many people come to him with a similar story, "Your mother helped me to get started in business...when I was in trouble your mother slipped me some money..." There was someone who had stored up for herself a good foundation for the future, who had already taken hold of the life that is really life. Now I'm suggesting that we should net out at zero, when our earthly life ends, but as Christ becomes your greatest treasure, the more generous you become with your earthly treasure.

One more thing. As more and more Christ becomes our greatest treasure we live with more and more hope.

Jesus said, "be dressed for action...have your lamps lit...be like those who are waiting for their Master to return from the wedding banquet, so they may open the door for him as soon as he knocks...Blessed are those slaves whom the Master finds alert when he comes...he will come and serve them...if he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves..."

If someone asked me what the biggest difference faith in Christ makes to me, I would answer in one word, hope, or to add an adjective, a sure hope, a real hope, a living hope.

Now we know what it is to have our earthly hopes dashed. If you're a Maple Leafs fan, your hopes for the season are gone by November; the Blue Jays, sometime in June. But Christ Crucified and Risen is the source of real hope, enduring hope. It's hope for the day of death, because Christ turns that day into a day of victory, a day he comes and takes the faithful to the heavenly wedding banquet. It's hope for the world. Yes, we humans can do good, but we also make a mess of things, and frankly, if the destiny of the world were left up to us, there would be no hope. But Christ is coming again openly as Lord of all, so that God's will is finally be done on earth as it is in heaven. The Kingdom in all its fullness will embrace and totally transform God's creation. It's hope for our darkest hours, because even then, especially then, Christ draws near. He whispers in the night, "Fear not, my child, fear not, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom." As Christ becomes our greatest treasure we are filled with more and more hope, for ourselves and for God's creation, hope even for our darkest hours. And we are blessed servants indeed. So let us take hold of Christ our greatest treasure by faith. Let us lift up our hearts and gird ourselves for faithful service.