

Sermon for August 10, 2025
Highland Presbyterian Church
Sermon texts: Luke 10:32-40 and Isaiah 1:1, 10-20
Sermon by: Rev. Adrian White

Jesus puts it so simply: “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” But of course, it doesn’t feel simple to live that way.

Last week, Megan invited us to consider the way that the Gospel of Luke illuminates Jesus’s teachings about money and his insistence that those who have material abundance must redistribute wealth and reduce their reliance on money to shape their sense of identity or contentment.

His saying, “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” serves as a bridge between talking explicitly about money — sell what you have and give alms, he insists — to speaking a bit more broadly about how people should treat that which can feel even more scarce — attention, time, energy. The invitation is to invest all of what we treasure in a way that reflects our deepest selves as beloved children of God.

Again, it sounds simpler than it is. In his effort to convey this teaching, Jesus uses a series of metaphors in today’s passage, which is a tiny excerpt from a long speech he is giving to a large audience. He is using settings and characters that would have been universally familiar then, but not all of those metaphors translate perfectly across the generations to our ears. For example, he uses the image of a lamp that is kept lit at all hours so that the household will be ready no matter what moment the master returns. And it’s a nice idea — but this isn’t Motel 6 flipping a switch and promising to leave the light on for Jesus. Maintaining a lamp all night in the first century required constant attention to the level of oil, the length of the wick, any sign of sparks that could cause a fire. It required devoted attention and care, careful planning, and coordination amongst the household — that’s what Jesus teaches his audience to provide in anticipation of the coming of God’s reign on earth.

I don’t think it’s right to overlook the fact that in this metaphor about attention and preparation, Jesus uses the characters of a master and his slaves. The ways that our

sacred text deals with slavery often make me feel uncomfortable, because I cannot square the loving God I know from scripture with a creator who approves of the forced subjugation of people for the benefit of a powerful few. Especially as a white person living in the racist legacy of chattel slavery in the United States, I don't want to take these metaphors for granted nor excuse them. But we also can't fully unpack them in this moment.

For today, let's notice that when Jesus uses as a setting for his parables the practice of enslavement, he subverts expectations and reverses power by casting the master as servant to the household that so faithfully anticipates his arrival. As commentator Casey Overton writes, "God as master relinquishes the power of the position to instead function as a servant or, more explicitly, a slave. Given the choice, God chooses to align Themself with the slaves."

And so the parable calls us to devoted preparation for the ways God is transforming space and becoming present and to not just service to others but radical solidarity with the poor and oppressed as exemplified in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Such a way of being starts with our alertness, our focus, our energy. And these can seem just as precious as money, perhaps especially for those of us privileged enough to never worry about how we're going to keep our own literal lights on. It is hard to find this kind of focus to give to God, especially in times when God feels far away, especially when there is so much to do. Even as a pastor, I struggle to find time for prayer and presence with God in between the meetings and the administrative tasks and making a beautiful program calendar and trying to get the printer to collate, please God just let the printer collate.

During this summer, I was blessed with multiple opportunities to nurture that kind of alertness in myself and others. Sometimes it even caught me by surprise.

First, I traveled with our high school youth to Montreat, North Carolina for youth conference and with the theme "Light My Path," I heard about God's call on our lives. Montreat is such an important time for our youth group to bond with one another and to make meaningful connections with youth from all over the southeast and

beyond. I treasure this time with our older youth and the conversations that emerge during meals and before and after events. It's also a place where I get to see beloved friends and colleagues who only find ourselves together at Montreat. In deep community, we felt God's presence working through our relationships.

I traveled with three of HPC's young people to Iona, Scotland, where pilgrims have made their way for 1500 years. We took four planes, two buses, and two ferries to get to Iona, but once we were there it was all about *walking*. Walking to the rocky beach, walking to the sandy beach, walking to the village hall, walking to the craft store. The short walk from the hotel to the abbey became a twice daily meditation as I prepared for worship. As I walked, I became more in tune with this small bit of land and my own physical self in a way that reconnected me to my spirit in ways I hadn't realized I needed quite so much.

Next, I traveled to Maryville College in Tennessee for the Montreat Middle School Conference and heard about the Wonderful ways God has made us, and the wonder with which we can encounter God. Many amazing things happened and one of them is that I got to play capture the flag. I even made a key contribution to my team winning one of our games. Friendly competition formed the backdrop to the chance to be silly, welcome strangers into the game, team up with a new friend, and be totally absorbed in an activity that wasn't mediated by technology, where the stakes were low and the reward tremendous. Our minds were clear enough to see the divine in each other.

Last but not least, I spent a few days right in downtown Louisville with a group of 17 youth from our presbytery for the Presbyterian Youth Triennium, exploring the theme "As if we were dreaming." For one of the recreation activities, we were blessed with a presentation of truly awesome artistic and cultural offerings. A group of youth from Trinidad and Tobago performed as a steel drum corps; the delegation from Puerto Rico taught us to salsa dance and shared original music. And then, just when we thought that must be the peak, a group called Haus of Us closed out the event. Based in New York, Haus of Us supports queer youth by providing opportunities to engage with ballroom and voguing, art forms that emerged from Black queer communities in the 1920s. On stage, they taught us the basics of voguing, with each member of the troupe showcasing one of the critical skills. Later, the group

presented in worship as well. I never expected to see Black queer art lifted up as a profound spiritual expression at a Presbyterian event- it felt like a sacred merging of worlds that delighted God's heart.

And so throughout the summer, with community, during play, in movement, and through art, I tuned into God's presence in ways that can elude me in day-to-day life. I felt ready for God to show up at any moment and in forms that I might not normally expect. And these are things I have access to all the time – I just don't always think of them as being essential aspects of my life with God. It reminded me that our whole lives are our lives with God. In the metaphor about preparedness, the oil, and the wick, and the clay bowl are all as essential to the lamp being a lamp as the light itself. When we tend to the parts that we can control and that we are responsible for, the light shines naturally.

And once we embrace community and play and all those other aspects that make life worth living and tune our attention to illuminating our life with God, love will shine forth from our hearts. When we trust in God's unfolding work in the world, when we shine a light on it, we'll recognize it when it comes. We'll know better how to invest our resources and our money and our energy for the glory of God and the well-being of others. True solidarity, the kind that reverses power and refuses to subjugate anyone but instead celebrates the image of God in all people, will be as natural as breathing.

And it's still not as simple as we might wish it to be. Sometimes God will feel too far away, and sometimes we will be distracted. But the good news is that with God's help, and with determination, as a community, So much is possible. As a community, we share the labor. We work together to shine a light that looks more and more like God's love in the world. May it be so.