“There Your Heart Will Be Also” November 7, 2021

Luke 12:22-34 Westminster, Greenville

24th Sunday after Pentecost Ben Dorr

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I’ve got three “Once Upon a Time” stories for you this morning.

The first one goes like this.

Once upon a time, Charles and Emily were hosting a dinner party.

When everyone had gathered around the table for dinner, Charles noticed that their young son, Robbie, was not with them.

Charles said to Emily, “Where’s Robbie?”

She said, “I think he’s outside.”

She went to the back door and called him, and then she went into the backyard to look for him, and then she came running back, and she said, “Charles, do something! He has a snake!”

Charles said, “You shouldn’t interfere with a boy growing up.”

“But it’s a snake!” she said.

He said, “Emily, our guests are ready for the meal. Let’s be seated.”

Everyone was seated, the blessing was offered, and after a little bit Robbie came into the house.

His dad said to him, “Go wash up, Robbie. Always wash your hands after you’ve been handling snakes.”

Now who was right?

Charles was right, of course.

One should not interfere with a child’s growing up, always protecting them from the bruises and pain and tears that are simply a part of life. The only way they learn when they fall off the bike is to get up again, dust themselves off and get back on the bike.

Charles was right.

But Emily was right.

This was no bike…this was a snake!

What kind of snake?

Charles didn’t know what kind of snake…it was a snake.

Sometimes the price is too high, the cost is too great.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Sometimes, it’s right to be worried!

(Let’s take a vote…how many of you think Robbie’s dad was right? How many think that Robbie’s mom was right??

Yeah, me too!)

Well, never mind Charles and Emily.

What about you?

Did you bring any with you into this sanctuary this morning?

I don’t mean snakes.

I mean worries.

In our text for today, Jesus says:

“…do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.”

To which I say, easier said than done, Jesus.

Easier said than done.

Of course, what’s fascinating about today’s text is where Luke places it.

This text is often treated as its own sermon, but it’s actually part of a larger sermon, a larger message that Jesus preaches. What we did was pick up right in the MIDDLE of the message.

All this talk from Jesus about “Don’t worry”…it takes place in the midst of a larger teaching about wealth, and possessions, money.

Just before this morning’s reading comes the parable of the rich fool. That’s the SECOND “Once upon a time” story…and you remember it, right?

We heard it earlier this fall.

What happens to this man who has stored up all his grain and his goods so that he can enjoy his golden years?

His soul is demanded of him!

And everything he had…whose will it be?

It’s at **this** point that Jesus tells his disciples:

Don’t worry…just as God clothes the lilies of the field, how much more will God provide for you?

And THEN, we hear this:

“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.”

So just to review:

Jesus tells a parable about a man who was NOT generous.

And 11 verses later, Jesus tells his disciples to BE generous.

And tucked in between, Jesus tells us not to worry, because God will always be generous with us.

**Generosity runs like a ribbon through Jesus’ sermon.**

In case you haven’t figured it out by now, this is going to be a stewardship sermon, since Commitment Sunday is next Sunday, but before we get to the stewardship part, I want to deal a bit more with the WORRY part.

Because worries are NOT just “Once upon a time” stories.

They’re the real deal.

In this room, at this moment…

* I’ll bet there’s someone who’s worried about a loved one’s health right now.
* Maybe there’s someone in the pews who’s worried about being in too much debt right now.
* There could be a high school senior who’s worried about getting into college next year.
* Or an elderly member of our church who’s worried about leaving her house of 50 years.

Is Jesus just telling us all to summon our inner Bobby McFerrin:

“Don’t worry, be happy?”

**If we all brought worries into this room with us today,**

**and we know that God isn’t asking us**

**to be an ANXIOUS people, but a generous people…**

**how do we get there?**

I think a clue is found in the last thing Jesus says today:

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

That’s not the way we usually think of it, right?

We think—where we put our hearts, that’s where our treasure will be.

But Jesus says: don’t let your heart lead.

Let your heart follow.

According to Jesus, our hearts are notoriously unreliable.

They can take us anywhere.

Has anyone here ever replied to a snarky email with your own even snarkier email? You zing them because they zung you, because that’s what was in your heart…and only later, you realized maybe you should not have gone with your heart?

Has anyone ever let their heart lead them by spending too much time at the office, and not enough time with your family?

Or by spending too much money on your own home, without spending your treasure to help those without a home?

Augustine called it disordered loves.

Our hearts fall in love with too many things, and when we let our hearts lead us, we tend to put those things in the wrong order.[[2]](#footnote-2)

We prize possessions over people.

We prioritize being right over being in relationship.

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

It means that our hearts need direction.

They need reminding.

By putting our treasure—

our time, our money, our energy—

by putting our treasure in what truly matters,

works of mercy and justice and peace—

…we are reminding our hearts of who God created us to be.

Let me get at it this way.

Sticking with the theme of generosity, I’m going to share a story about baseball that has NOTHING to do with the Yankees! Isn’t that a generous thing for me to do?

A colleague went to a baseball game a few years ago.

It was a Mets game, a blustery, windy day.

Dust and grit was blowing in everyone’s faces.

The Mets were losing, the crowd was in a foul mood.

One of the players hit a ball that was hooking foul, into the stands. And a young boy, elementary age, reached up with his glove to catch the ball.

But then the guy sitting next to the kid stood up, reached above the boy, and caught the ball instead.

The child was clearly disappointed.

Most everyone in the ballpark saw this unfold.

So…a chant started in the stands.

**“Give the kid the ball. Give the kid the ball.”**

At first, the man ignored it all.

He pretended that he wasn’t listening, talking to a friend.

But then the chants got louder.

And then the JUMBOTRON showed a picture of the man ignoring the chants….right up there for everyone to see.

**“Give the kid the ball. Give the kid the ball.”**

Now if you were in a stadium with 50,000 New Yorkers, and they were telling you to give a baseball to a child, what would you do?

Well, that’s finally what the man did too.

He gave the ball to the kid, and the crowd ERUPTED!

There was cheering all around.

A short time later, an usher showed up and handed the man a couple gifts from the Mets, including a brand-new ball of his own.[[3]](#footnote-3)

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Now some might take a skeptical view, and say that the man just was PRESSURED into giving the ball away.

His heart…it wasn’t really in it!

To which Jesus would say: that’s precisely my point!

I think Jesus would say—that man needed a little nudge. He needed a nudge to be generous, and if that nudge came in the form of 50,000 chanting fans and his own image on a Jumbotron…who cares?

It was a good reminder for that man…of who he was supposed to be.

Now we may not be surround by a 50,000 people and a Jumbotron on Sundays…but we are surrounded by one another. Which means Westminster is where we’re reminded of who God created us to be.

Not people who WORRY about the future.

But people who are HOPEFUL about the future.

Not people who SCARED of our neighbors.

But people who are generous and hospitable toward our neighbors.

Not people who hold on to the baseballs that we catch.

But people who share the baseballs that we work hard to earn, or the baseballs that just happen to fall into our hands…

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A few years ago, I read a post on Facebook

The title: “Do You Really Need Church?”—a good question for any stewardship sermon.

The author was Tara Woodard-Lehman.

Part of her post went like this.

“Not long ago I was having a conversation with a college student.

Like many young adults, this guy was a religious ‘none’.... And…he found my commitment to ‘traditional religion’ quite curious.

“I mean, I get why you’re into ‘being spiritual’ and ‘helping people’ and everything, but why bother with Church?

Do you think you need it?’

“He went on to describe how irrelevant the Church was. In his view, all the Church once provided can be found elsewhere in civic life.

“From community service projects to book clubs;

from outreach to the poor to potlucks;

from meditation groups to support groups—

he described the many other places that provide much of what the Church used to (and occasionally still does) provide.

“And you know what I concluded?

He was, at least in part, right.

If the Church is only what he described (a sort of glorified community center or service provider), it is a wonder anyone shows up.

Why both with Church at all?

“Why don’t I just hit the bagel shop, join another yoga class…and volunteer at a soup kitchen every once in a while?”

But then, she goes on to say the following:

“After giving it much consideration, I’ve decided that there is at least one very good reason why I need Church: I have a really bad memory….

“Especially when it comes to remembering who I am as a child of God. Especially when it comes to remembering what God has done,

and continues to do, in and through Jesus Christ.

“…there are a gazillion other demands and voices

that are vying for my attention all the freaking time.

“So…I get tired. And I get distracted.

And more often than not, I forget.

“I forget who I am. I forget who God is.

I forget God’s Epic Story of Redemption…

and Beauty and Hope.

“…don’t get me wrong.

I still practice yoga…

“But it’s no replacement for hearing God’s Story, read and proclaimed, week after week.

“I need Church, because Church reminds me of everything that’s important.

“And when I say Church…I mean the people…I’m talking about the beautiful but undeniably imperfect community of people who help me remember who I am, and to Whom I belong, over and over again.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

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You know who else has a poor memory?

I do.

Oh sure, I have a weird memory—I’m good at remembering who won the World Series dating back to the year I was born, or who played in every Super Bowl.

But do those things really matter?

I have a poor memory when it comes to what’s most important in life, and I forget where my heart needs to be.

And then I come to church.

And what happens in this church is…you help me remember.

When I see you giving your vacation time to go on a mission trip, you help me remember.

When I see you sharing your faith with a sleepy-eyed 8th grader on a Sunday morning, you help me remember.

When I see you walking faithfully through a pandemic, you help me remember.

You help me remember that I am not my own person, I am God’s person.

You help me remember that I am—like each of you—a child of God, created by God to be generous with my treasure,

made by God to share abundantly all the gifts

that God has given me.

During this stewardship season we’ve all been asked to consider why Westminster is our church home, and what that word—HOME—means when we’re talking about Westminster Presbyterian Church.

What does this church home mean to you?

Let me share with you what it means to me.

It’s “Once upon a time” story number three.

Once upon a time, there was a little girl who got lost, and she did not remember her home address. Her mother had prepared her well for the possibility. She knew to find a police officer, and she did.

The officer put the girl in the front seat and began driving around, somewhat aimlessly around the neighborhood.

Finally, in the distance, the little girl saw her church’s steeple.

The officer headed that direction.

When they reached the church, the girl asked to be let out.

“But don’t you want me to take you home?” the officer asked.

“That’s okay,” said the little girl, “now that I have found my church, I can find my way home.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

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You know what I’m going to think about this week?

How every Sunday, when I show up for church, my heart could be absolutely anywhere…but then I see the love and grace of God at work in this community of faith…and you help me find my way home.

You put my heart where it needs to be.

Thanks be to God for the treasure that is this church.

Amen.

1. As told by Dr. Fred Craddock, in *Craddock Stories*, edited by Mike Graves and Richard F. Ward, St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. I am indebted to *The New York Times* columnist, David Brooks, for this information about Augustine. Brooks has discussed “disordered loves” in many podcasts/interviews. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The colleague referenced here is the Rev. Scott Black Johnston. This story comes from his sermon, “Share,” preached at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City, October, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Tara Woodard Lehman’s article came from the Huffington Post and can be found at [Do You Really Need Church? | HuffPost Communities](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/do-you-really-need-church_b_3751147). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. I am indebted to the Rev. Karl Travis for this story. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)